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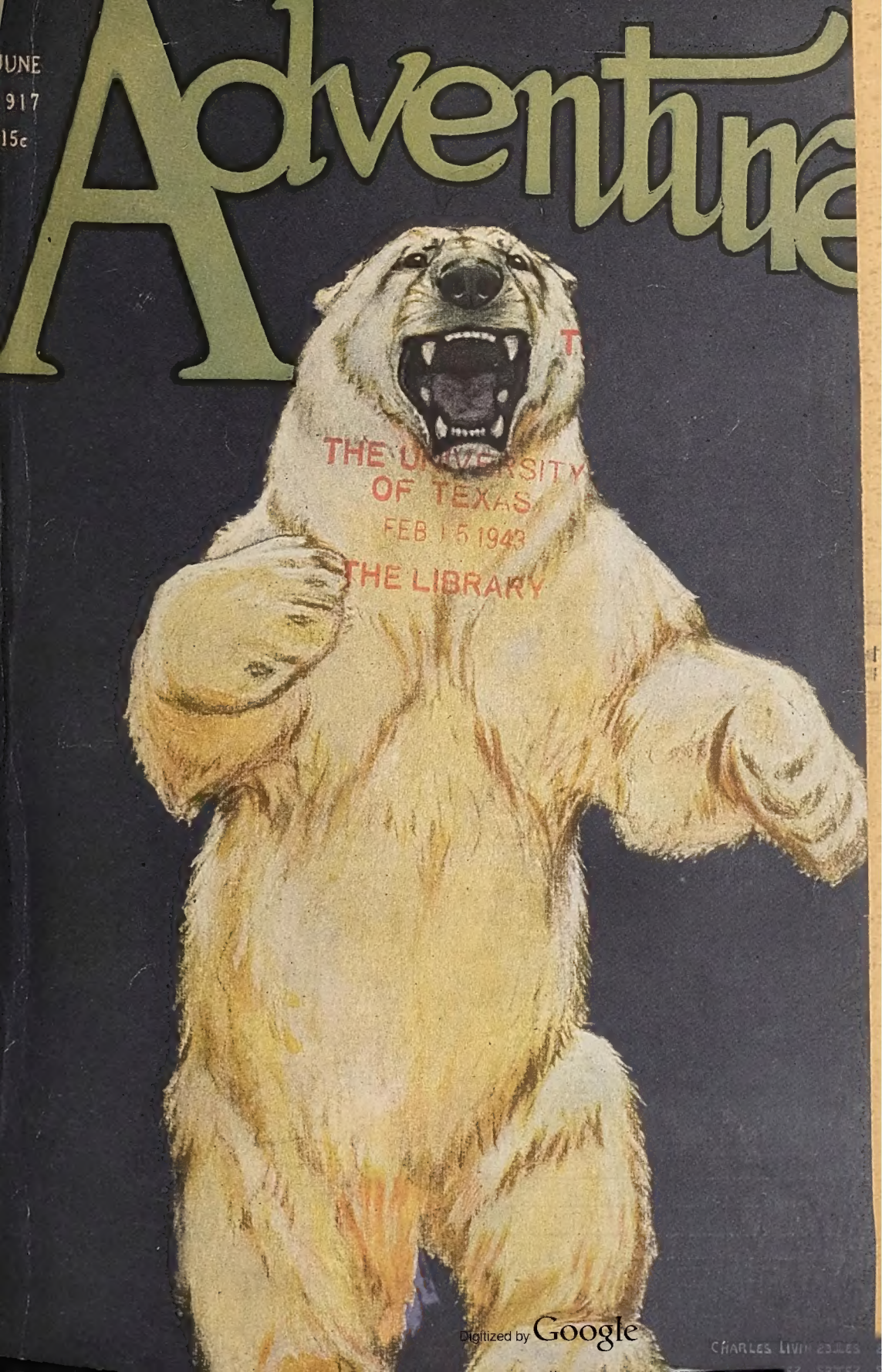

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I. C. S. NEWS

Scranton, Pa., June, 1917

More students were graduated from the I. C. S. in 1916 than from any other institution of learning in the United States.

James Leroy Stevens, an I. C. S. Civil Engineering student, has been appointed City Engineer of Mishawaka, Ind.

Nearly every draftsman employed by the Warner Gear Company, Muncie, Ind., is a student in the International Correspondence Schools.

The Standard Motor Construction Company, Jersey City, N. J., have made arrangements with the I. C. S. for the instruction of their employes.

W. G. Ritzer, Montreal, Canada, who enrolled as a clerk, age 19, for the I. C. S. Chemistry Course, has been made head chemist of the Montreal Locomotive Works, Ltd.

Ira G. Whipple, Topeka, Kansas, has been promoted to Assistant Chief Engineer of the Topeka Edison Company. His salary has been increased 150 per cent. since he enrolled for his I. C. S. Course in Steam-Electric Engineering.

The National President of the National Association of Stationary Engineers, Walter H. Damon, Springfield, Mass., became an I. C. S. Student while working as an oiler. He is proud of the Schools that helped him climb to the top.

A. M. Bowyer, Indianapolis, Ind., has tripled his salary since he took up his I. C. S. Mechanical Engineering Course. He was a telegraph operator and is now Draftsman for the Nordyke & Marmon Co., makers of Marmon Motor Cars.

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ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

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"ROTORUA REX"

A South Sea Tale by

J. ALLAN DUNN

"Jack Gray, Second Mate"
by William Hope Hodgson

"The Misfit Turns Banker"
by William H. Hamby

"Twilight Jack"
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"Magpie—Diplomat"
by W. C. Tuttle

"Koshinga"
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"The Mirrors of the World"
by James Francis Dwyer

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by George Warburton Lewis

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AND OTHERS

ADVENTURE FOR JULY

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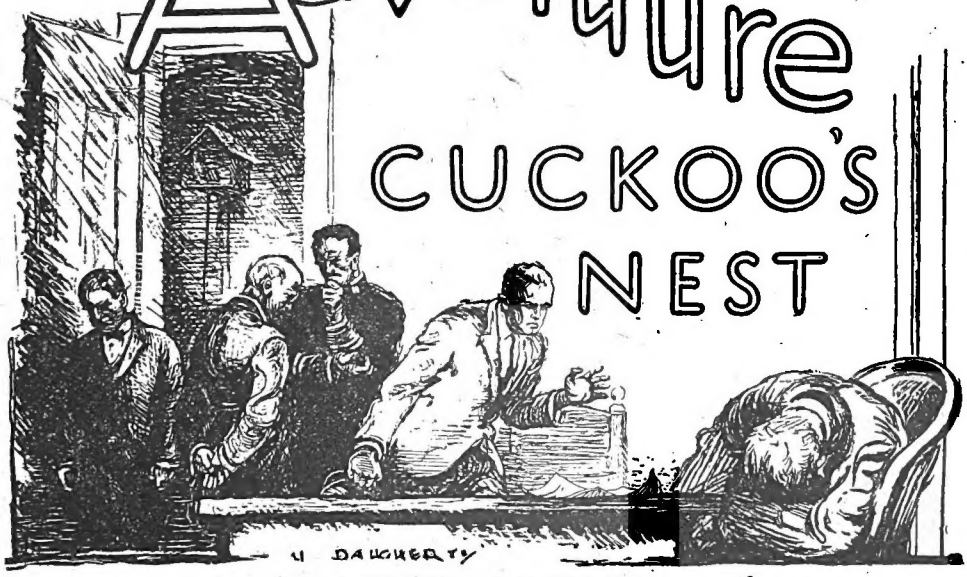

A COMPLETE NOVEL by RAYMOND BARRETT

Author of "The Red Alphabet"

CHAPTER I

THE EMPTY NEST

ADAMS jumped out of the taxicab, paid the driver with unsteady fingers, and turned a troubled face toward the Cuckoo's Nest.

The crowd about the guarded gate fell away before the young man in respectful silence. Here and there a neighbor offered a sympathetic greeting and received a grateful nod of recognition. But one man stepped assuredly into his path and extended a card.

"Mr. Adams?" The inflection in his voice made the words less an inquiry than a demand for attention.

With a question in his eyes, Adams reluctantly accepted the card.

"I'm Yarrow," explained the other, tapping the card with a stubby forefinger. "You'll be wanting some one to investigate this for you, Mr. Adams?"

Yarrow was a man nearing fifty, with sunbrowned skin and a self-possessed manner. Although he stood a scant inch below the average height, his ill-fitting ready-made suit refused to accommodate itself to the breadth of his shoulders and the length of his arms. He gave the impression of constantly listening for something that he could not quite catch, like a suddenly wakened watch dog, with ear acock for a trespasser; yet his rugged, smooth face was expressionless, save for the intensity of his deep gray eyes, that had enabled him to hold Adams in spite of the latter's impatience to get on.

Adams's glance fell from the man's person to his card, which bore the announcement of Mr. Yarrow's profession:

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G. M. YARROW J. VALENTINE HART

YARROW & HART
INVESTIGATORS AND ANALYSTS
1000 CLEGSTONE BUILDING,
PHONE CLEWS 1516 CHICAGO

"Oh! a detective!" muttered Adams.

"Hey?" queried Yarrow, with his head acock.

Conscious of a passing wonder at the idea of a deaf detective, Adams repeated his observation in a louder tone, as he pressed forward toward the gate. Yarrow kept step with him—not obtrusively, but as one who had business that would not wait.

"My preference is for investigator," he stated colorlessly. "Not that it matters——"

The policeman guarding the gate allowed them to bump into him before he spoke.

"Nobody home," he began wearily.

"I'm Adams," explained that gentleman shortly; "Mr. Barlow 's cousin. Captain Tracy phoned for me."

"Oh!"

The officer stepped aside to let Adams pass; but he barred the gate again when Yarrow would have followed.

"I told you once to keep out!" he blustered.

Yarrow pulled aside his coat to show the shield pinned to his suspender strap.

"Representing Mr. Adams," he announced carelessly, as he shouldered his way through the gate.

Grudgingly the officer stepped aside again, while Adams stopped to let Yarrow catch up with him.

"What do you mean by making such a statement?" demanded the young man. "I haven't engaged you, and I'm not going to."

"No objection to my looking about a bit, I suppose?" Yarrow asked pacifically.

"No-o; but——"

A man was running down the porch steps toward them; and Adams, quickening his pace, put Yarrow out of his mind. The investigator fell in behind, alert but unobtrusive; his rubber heels made no sound on the concrete walk.

"Mr. Adams! Oh, Mr. Adams!" gasped the runner.

"Well, Ben!" Adams clasped the half-offered hand in a firm grip. "It's come, then?"

"Yes, sir."

Ben's breathless agitation had suddenly passed, leaving him cold, almost sullen.

"How did it happen?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Adams, but I ain't to talk to you about it. Captain Tracy——"

"Why on earth didn't *you* notify me, instead of the police?" demanded Adams with a return of his impatience.

Ben glanced up under his shaggy brows.

"I—I was busy," he muttered. He scowled behind him at the impassive, unobtrusive investigator and lowered his voice. "How'll I swear, Mr. Adams? They'll have to be an inquest."

"Tell the truth, of course! How——"

Adams held his question unasked, while he studied the double house that composed Cuckoo's Nest. He could observe nothing unusual, however, except for the stolid policeman on the porch, and the uneasy persons on the walk below whom he took to be reporters. Both houses were so silent that they gave the impression of being unoccupied; indeed, the front door on Adams's right stood half open, as if the occupant of that particular dwelling had just stepped out.

But it was toward the left of the house that Adams was looking when he finally asked—

"How's Decker taking it?"

Ben almost started, as he followed the direction of Adams's eyes.

"Guess he ain't heard yet. Nobody seems to be about."

"Not even—Ann?"

The hesitation was almost imperceptible; but Ben noted it, and he dropped his eyes as he answered—

"No, sir."

Adams's sigh was equally repressed; but again Ben mentally noted this slight evidence of emotion. He opened his lips, then closed them tightly and shambled along beside his companion.

AS THEY neared the house, the reporters surged to meet Adams, clamorous for an interview. Their clicking cameras and tumbling questions brought a frown to the young man's face.

"Not now!" he protested with what friendliness he could muster. "Captain Tracy's waiting for me."

But the reporters were eager to get the story for their noon editions; and, as the police would not admit them to the house, they clung to Adams as a forlorn hope. It was only when Ben threatened to "muss up

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some of their maps" that they reluctantly stood aside.

Adams and Ben mounted the short flight of steps to the broad common porch, were passed by the stolid officer in answer to Ben's brief, "It's Mr. Adams," and entered the open door at the right. Yarrow displayed his shield again and followed them into the dusky hall. There he seemed to dissolve into the shadows, while Ben led his companion past a closed and guarded door into a small room at the end of the short hall.

At their entrance, two men ended their low-toned conversation and faced expectantly about.

"It's Mr. Adams," Ben repeated.

"Captain Tracy, I presume?" asked Adams of the burly, gray-haired officer whose uniform justified the title.

"Right!" acknowledged the captain with official brusqueness. "Meet Dr. Noble from the coroner's office. He's acting deputy—Coroner Jackson's out on another job."

Having thus defined their official relations, the captain unbent sufficiently to apologize for the curt summons that he had given over the telephone. Apparently he was anxious to set Adams at ease; but his real purpose was to make an opportunity to "size up" this cousin of Barlow's before proceeding to question him.

Adams was a man in his early thirties, who, while he would not be considered handsome, had the wholesome appearance of one who had lived decently and comfortably, with equal care for mind and body. If an occasional word or gesture betrayed his possession of a quick temper, the firm set of his mouth showed that he usually had himself well in hand, and the frank, straightforward expression of his eyes revealed a nature kindly and honest. Altogether he appeared to be a very likable person, quite capable of looking after his own interests, and sufficiently self-respectful to merit the respect of other men.

It was this last characteristic that guided the police captain in his questioning and induced him to ask:

"You're next of kin, I hear, and can take charge of Mr. Barlow's affairs?"

Adams replied with marked hesitation:

"Yes—and no. I presume I have all the authority necessary for the time being."

"You're his logical heir, aren't you?" asked the doctor bluntly.

Adams's hesitation was again apparent.

"His *logical* heir, perhaps."

"Disinherited?" guessed the doctor.

"Frankly, I don't know. If there's a will, I probably am."

"You've had differences?" asked Captain Tracy.

"Scores of them, off and on. He was rather a hard man to get on with."

"So I understand," assented the captain. "We've looked about a bit, and I doubt if you'll find a will here."

"He usually kept it here—in his safe."

"So I guessed. Ben, tell him how you found Mr. Barlow. Maybe it'll mean more to Mr. Adams than it does to me."

In response to Adams's eager agreement, Ben came reluctantly forward.

"Make it short," advised the captain, as they seated themselves.

Ben nodded; but he kept his eyes on Adams, and apparently addressed him alone.

"I never heard a thing, sir——"

"Cut that!" snapped Tracy. "Tell him what you do know."

Ben growled sulkily and began again:

"I didn't know a thing till this morning, Mr. Adams. I heard the cuckoo-clock strike the three-quarters, and flopped over for another snooze; then it struck seven, right on top of that. I dug out my watch——"

"What's this stuff about the cuckoo-clock?" interrupted Tracy, looking at Adams. "How can a clock strike three-quarters and the hour in the same breath?"

Adams laughed shortly.

"It's the big clock down the hall he means. And cuckoo-clocks do queer things sometimes."

"Wouldn't have one about the house," asserted the captain. "They're blame nuisances, if you ask me."

"This clock was a fad with Cousin Henry," explained Adams. "He wouldn't let any one else touch it. I'm surprised to learn that it's out of order."

"It's been striking crazy all the morning," added Ben.

"It don't matter," growled the captain; "get on with your yarn."

"I dug out my watch," repeated Ben, with his eye on Adams, "and that said seven, too. I climbed into my rags as fast as I could make it, wondering why the boss hadn't routed me out as usual at six-thirty. But when I sneaked down the back stairs to the dining-room, the table was still set for breakfast, and cook was still snoring in her room off the kitchen."

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"Barlow's worth a million or two, ain't he?" interrupted Tracy.

"Dunno," muttered Ben.

"How about it?" the captain demanded of Adams.

"Easily," was the ready answer.

"Then how comes it he's living here with only Ben and a cook?"

"He didn't like a lot of servants about."

"Decker feel that same way?"

"I suppose so." Adams's response was not so careless as he would have liked to make it.

"That the reason they got only a maid on the other side?" sneered the captain.

"No-o," admitted Adams with evident reluctance. "Miss Decker's had trouble keeping servants; she's glad to do with Hilda."

"Huh!" snorted Tracy. "Miss Decker's mother's dead, ain't she?"

"Yes—years ago."

"Drive on, Ben," nodded Tracy.

"You found cook snoring," prompted Adams; and Ben took up his tale:

"I tiptoes back up the back stairs to see if the boss was still asleep. The door of his room was half open, like it often is these hot nights; and when I rubbered in, I saw the bed hadn't even been opened up. Next best bet was to look down in the living-room—he might be asleep in his chair. Anyhow, that's where I left him—when I met you going out, Mr. Adams."

"What time was that?" asked Tracy.

"Eleven o'clock. The cuckoo was striking when I said good night."

"I remember," nodded Adams.

"He was there, all right," resumed Ben. "All the lights was on, and I could see him——"

Captain Tracy coughed. Ben stopped, closed his lips as he had done when coming up the walk, and looked at Adams.

"Well?" asked the latter.

"Wait till you see him."

"Dead?" asked Adams in a hushed voice.

"Dead as a doornail," was the callous answer.

"You're sure you left everything just as you found it?" asked the captain anxiously.

Ben grunted assent and grinned with surly sheepishness.

"I ain't what you'd call scared o' dead ones; but I ain't one to fuss over 'em."

"How long was it before you notified the station?" asked Tracy.

Ben answered with some resentment:

"That ain't the first time you've asked that. How the devil do you suppose I know?"

"You might have heard the cuckoo-clock strike again," mildly suggested the doctor.

Ben snapped ill-temperedly at the suggestion.

"You live as long with one o' them things as I have, and you can't hear it strike even when you're listening for it."

"That's true enough," nodded the doctor readily.

"But you say you heard it strike eleven last night," persisted the captain. "You both said you heard it."

"Well, what of it?" retorted Ben truculently. "I didn't have anything on my mind then, did I?"

"Better lay off, captain!" laughed the doctor. "The man's got the psychologists at his back."

"Why didn't you phone me at once?" demanded Adams in a tone that showed him still puzzled on that point.

"What good could you do, sir?" asked Ben with a respect that he had accorded to neither of the others. "I could see he was dead, right enough; but I knew the police would want a doctor to look at him soon as possible."

"You did all right," commended Tracy.

Feeling that he should be satisfied on that point, if the police were, Adams turned to the doctor.

"How long has Cousin Henry been dead?"

"It's hard to say," was the indifferent answer. "Several hours, I should guess."

"But I thought you doctors could figure pretty closely?"

"That all depends. I haven't really examined him yet, you know. We were waiting for you."

"But he was always abed by midnight," persisted Adams. "So it must have been before that he was killed."

"Killed?" snapped Tracy. "How do you know he was killed? All I said over the phone was he'd been found dead." He wheeled sharply upon Ben. "If you've been blabbing——"

"I didn't need to be told," interrupted Adams, surprised at the officer's heat. "He's been expecting it for years."

"So I been telling him," added Ben.

"Huh!" grunted Tracy, glaring at them suspiciously. "Let's go give the living-room the once over."

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CHAPTER II

BEHIND THE SHADES

THE house that Henry Barlow had rechristened "Cuckoo's Nest" had been built in the early days when homelike Prairieview was still several miles south of sprawling, unkempt Chicago. When finally it was annexed to Chicago, as part of the great South Side, Prairieview had fought to retain its distinction as a town of homes, rather than as a jumble of crowded flat-buildings; in consequence, it still contained several big vacant lots. Thus, while the Cuckoo's Nest faced upon shady, populous Elm Street, it adjoined on the south a considerable stretch of unimproved prairie, where tumbleweeds and waste papers sported in the lake winds.

The Cuckoo's Nest was set well back from the sidewalk line, so that it had broad lawns on all sides. It boasted a five-foot hedge, reinforced by an iron fence; and it was further shielded from the public eye by thick shrubbery massed about the house. From the street the building gave the impression of being a single house; in reality, it was a double or twin house, with only its broad porch in common.

The two front doors opened side by side from the common porch, each into its own short hall. Across the front of the first floor extended two great living-rooms; each had a splendid bay-window, looking across the green lawn that surrounded the house, and communicated, by means of sliding double doors, with its dining-room behind.

At the time it was built, the Barlow living-room had been called the parlor, and had been planned as a fit setting for splendid functions; but Barlow had used it as his office, and had furnished it so meagerly that it appeared barren and desolate. In the exact center of the bare polished floor stood a big library table, with a massive swivel chair at either of its long sides. Six other chairs, ponderous and uncomfortable-looking, were placed at regular intervals against the walls; and that, with a steel filing-cabinet, a small square safe, and a wall telephone, made up the contents of the room.

The walls were as bare as the floor; and nowhere—on mantel, or table, or filing-case—were there any of the minor articles of ornament or use that even a severely furnished office might contain. As if to complete the impression of barrenness, the fine old fireplace had been robbed of its andirons, and the French windows had been fitted with heavy shades.

When Adams followed Captain Tracy into the room, these shades were still drawn close, and the incandescent bulbs were glowing yellow against the green-tinted daylight that filtered through.

That was the first thing that struck Adams—the incongruity of this hushed room, with its drawn shades and blazing bulbs, while out-of-doors the busy world was going about its affairs under the light of a bright June sun. Next he noted with surprise the open safe, and the litter of papers from it and the filing-cabinet strewn about the usually tidy room. It was almost as an afterthought that he turned to the silent figure about which this orderly little world had once revolved.

But when his eyes had found that figure it held them as if by a horrible fascination. Slowly, lifting his feet with a visible effort, he approached the broad table in the center of the room.

Behind him, with heads close together and their lips moving in noiseless whispers, the police captain and the deputy coroner watched his least movement. Nearer the hall door, but as intent as they, Ben also watched, and clenched his fists at what he saw.

And now the incandescents justified their apparent waste of electricity, for they brought out each gruesome detail far more clearly than the filtered daylight could have done.

BARLOW sat at the big library table as if asleep. His head was pillowed upon his left arm, so that his face was covered; his right arm was bent under him until the hand was hidden by his body. His position was so easy, so natural, that Adams caught himself listening for the quiet breathing of the peaceful sleeper. This, in spite of the fact that the sleeper's head was cruelly beaten in at the back, and that the rivulets of blood on his pale cheek had ceased to flow, and turned brown.

Tracy approached so softly and spoke so abruptly that Adams started at the sound of his voice.

"Nasty mess, ain't it?" he remarked with no particular evidence of interest.

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"Blows enough wasted to kill a dozen men."

"The first one probably did for him," supplemented the doctor. "There's no sign of a struggle."

"What did it?" asked Adams, hoarsely.

Tracy shook his head impatiently. "We haven't found a thing that would make such a wound."

"Here's a smear of blood on the table."

"There's another on the corner of Barlow's jacket, where the murderer wiped his weapon."

"Those ought to help."

"They're just smears—not a finger-print or a clue anywhere."

It was plain that the captain considered himself professionally aggrieved by such unusual care on the part of the murderer.

"Did you notice these peculiar corrugations on the scalp, Mr. Adams?"

The doctor was speaking with the air of a clinical demonstrator and using his forefinger like a pointer. To Adams's shivering disgust, he even went so far as to pick up with his finger-end a narrow strip of scalp, bristling with stiff gray hair.

"Can you imagine any weapon that would at once crush and tear, as this appears to have done?"

"The only thing I can think of is a heavy cane that splintered under the blows," hazarded Adams.

The other two exchanged quick glances over his head.

"We thought of that," said the doctor, "but it doesn't altogether meet the requirements."

"Besides," added Tracy, "if he came heeled for a killing, why didn't he bring along a blackjack? It's surer and handier. Of course, there's nothing to prevent the murderer carrying a busted cane away with him; but it looks to me like this was done by a man so crazy that he grabbed up the first thing he could get his hands on."

"A crazy man?" Adams repeated, as if the suggestion had started him upon a painful train of thought.

"It seems probable," answered the doctor. "A man must be insane, or in an insane rage, to beat up his victim like that."

"Of course you know your business," said Adams somewhat stubbornly, "but I'd be inclined to follow up the theory of a man with a heavy cane. Ben's told you, I presume, that Cousin Henry made it a point to have nothing about that could be used as a weapon?"

"He did," nodded the captain; "and I must say I never saw a more harmless room in my life. There ain't even an inkstand to give heft to a man's fist."

"Even the chairs are too heavy for the average man to lift," supplemented Adams. "Did you notice that?"

Tracy grunted his disbelief and reached for the nearest chair. He lifted it easily enough; but when he essayed to whirl it up over his head in the manner of a weapon he realized the truth of Adams's statement.

"I'd as soon try to crack a man's bean with a baby elephant," he admitted.

"You see," persisted Adams, "the murderer must have provided his own weapon."

"If he did, he took it away with him," growled the captain; "but it'll turn up again. We got men enough on the case to find a needle in a haystack."

"But doesn't the rifled safe look like ordinary burglary?"

"Naw!" growled Tracy. "The crib wasn't cracked—either it was already open, or the murderer was wise to the combination. He knew what he was after, too, if those scattered papers mean anything."

"Funny Ben wasn't disturbed," observed Adams. "You recognized Ben, I suppose?"

"Knew him twenty years ago, back of the Yards," said Tracy with a grin that was not unkindly. "He had some rep as an all-around bad man!"

Ben growled inarticulately from his post near the hall door, and the captain turned to him reassuringly.

"When I got my transfer to this district, and found you playing watch-dog for a millionaire, I kept my eye peeled for trouble. It looked to me like queer doings; but you've gone straight."

Ordinarily Ben had a hang-dog air and a shambling gait nicely calculated to deceive the unobservant; but, as he stepped forward to face the gibing captain, his head was erect, almost arrogantly so.

"You're dead right," he said with cool scorn. "I'd 'a' gone the limit for him, if it'd come to a scrap. I'm sore at myself for not being on the job last night. But I hated him just the same—he was a dog! And now he's croaked, I'm glad of it."

The three men were startled into a gaping silence which was finally broken by Tracy's cold voice—

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"That's a fool crack for you to make—and him sitting there with his head stove in."

"You'd say the same, if you'd seen how he's rough-housed Mr. Adams all these years."

Adams caught the swift look that passed between the officials and hastened to relieve the situation by saying lightly:

"Ben's one of these chicken-hearted fighters: he'll take any amount of pounding himself, but he can't stand for seeing another man get an occasional wallop."

"Ben talks too much with his mouth," muttered the captain, then abruptly changed the subject. "If Barlow was scared of his life, why didn't he pack a gun?"

"He did," affirmed Adams. "I think you'll find he has one gripped in that hidden right hand."

"So that's it?" softly mused the captain.

"Shall we see?" asked the doctor, putting out a hand toward the still figure.

"Not yet!" Tracy almost snapped the prohibition.

"You're mistaken, though," added Adams, "if you think of him as being scared—he was merely ready for trouble. Cousin Henry could handle a gun in true Western style—I've seen him. And I don't believe he was really afraid of anything on earth."

"Or in hell," growled Ben.

Adams gave the man a warning look.

"And you don't know what kind of trouble he expected?" queried Dr. Noble with patent wonder.

"No more than you do—except that it appeared to be connected with his old life in the West."

"How about the Deckers?" asked Tracy. "They been living in the other half of the house for years, ain't they?"

Adams took just an appreciable time for thought before he answered.

"Decker and he were old friends out West. It wasn't easy for the Deckers to find just the right place——"

"Decker's crazy, ain't he?"

"No, he's not!" was the sharp reply.

"It's the talk of the neighborhood."

"He's not right, it's a fact." Adams turned to Noble, as if implying that the doctor would appreciate the nice distinction that he was about to make. "He's childish, but perfectly harmless. Sometimes he appears perfectly normal for several days."

"Such cases are not unusual," acquiesced the doctor.

"He's crazy as a bug," insisted Tracy.

"He can't be very bad or he wouldn't have been allowed to live here all these years," was the doctor's careless retort.

"I always thought Cousin Henry bought the place partly to provide a home for Decker," continued Adams.

"Got a man to look after him, ain't he?" asked Tracy.

"Yes—a trained nurse."

"I know him," volunteered the doctor; "Slocum's his name. He was on at Kankakee for a while."

"Decker and Barlow were always scrapping, weren't they?" demanded Tracy.

"Well, yes," admitted Adams reluctantly. "They were really very good friends, I'm sure, but they were usually differing about something."

"For example?"

"Well—money matters, for one."

"Decker's got money, ain't he?"

"Certainly."

"What else did they scrap about?"

Adams flushed slightly, but answered without hesitation:

"My marrying Miss Decker. Cousin Henry approved, but Decker was rather nasty about it."

"Why?"

"I don't know, unless it was because Cousin Henry did approve. You know how two old friends do enjoy taking opposite sides for the sake of an argument?"

Adams's tone was almost appealing; and Captain Tracy signified that he understood and was satisfied.

"I don't want to interfere," said Adams diffidently; "but is it necessary to leave him here?" with a slight nod toward Barlow. "It— He's not a pretty sight."

"We're waiting for the coroner's jury," explained Dr. Noble.

"Jury's outside now, sir," announced the officer who guarded the hall door.

"Tell them to come ahead," ordered Tracy.

THE jurymen filed in quietly, fumbling with their hats and showing in varying degrees the reluctance with which the average man looks upon death by violence. One or two of them were neighbors of Barlow; perhaps all of them had known him by reputation. It is

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probable that none of them had had any kindly regard for the crabbed old millionaire, or would have said a good word for him in life. But now, as they looked down upon him, suddenly and brutally snatched from the ranks of the living, their faces blended pity with horror.

The doctor, in his rôle of clinical demonstrator, spoke a few brief, low-toned sentences and took care that each of them got an unobstructed view of the wound.

"That's all for the present, gentlemen," he concluded. "Inquest's at one—in this room. Coroner Jackson will be in charge. Don't keep him waiting."

The jurymen murmured their understanding, then they filed out as quietly as they had come, and more willingly.

"All right," said Tracy crisply, "now let's get to it. We won't need you, Ben; but stick to the house and keep your trap shut. Any money kept in that safe, Mr. Adams?"

"Never to my knowledge. Cousin Henry did keep a lot of papers there, as you can see from the mess."

"Anything of value?"

"No; only personal papers."

"How about jewelry?"

"He considered jewelry effeminate."

"What's that junk over by the filing-case?"

"Business letters, and that sort of thing."

"He kept the will here, you said?"

"As a rule."

"Ever see it?"

"I've seen several," was the somewhat evasive answer.

"S'pose you get the lot together and check up? You handled his business, you said?"

"All of it," answered Adams, willingly accepting the task of collecting the scattered papers. "But most of this stuff appears to be personal memoranda that don't mean anything to me."

Under cover of Adams's occupation, the two officials quietly proceeded to make a careful examination of the dead man. Presently Dr. Noble emitted a startled ejaculation which caused Adams to rise up on his knees to question them.

"What is it?"

"The gun—just as you suspected," answered Tracy, exhibiting the revolver in proof.

Dr. Noble seemed to be working excitedly over Barlow; but as Adams had no desire to make a personal examination of the body, he remained where he was.

"It was in the table drawer," continued the captain. "Did you know he kept it there?"

"Yes, he showed it to me several times to prove that he was always ready for trouble."

"You can identify it as his, then?"

Adams scarcely gave the weapon a second glance.

"Oh, yes. You'll find his initials scratched on the butt, I think."

"Right you are!"

The policeman at the door growled a sudden, "No, you don't!" and then expelled his breath in a wheezy groan. The door slammed back against the wall, and into the room danced a tall, emaciated man, whose only apparel was a suit of blue-and-white striped pajamas.

"Good Lord!" whispered Adams, still staring up from his kneeling position. "This is no place for him."

As he sighted the silent figure at the table, the dancing man stopped his fantastic gambols and emitted a throaty chuckle.

"It wasn't a dream!" he muttered, drawn nearer by the fascination of the spectacle. "It wasn't a dream!" he chuckled again.

In the hall behind him, the cuckoo-clock sounded the three-quarters, then began calling the hour of ten.

Into the intruder's face, heretofore mirroring the wonder of a vacant mind, flashed a look of fiendish exultation. The sunken eyes flamed red; the thin lips curled back from the yellow teeth in a wolfish snarl; the bony fingers alternately clenched and clawed.

The man turned his head to leer at the calling cuckoo.

"Hush, you fool! Can't you see he's dead?"

Then he flung out both writhing claws toward the unmoved figure at the table.

"*You* won't devil me any more with your —— cuckoo-clocks!"

CHAPTER III

YARROW INTRUDES

THIS, while the policeman at the door still gasped for breath, and the men in the room remained dazed and appalled.

The policeman crossed the floor in long

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strides and swung the pajama-clad intruder about by the shoulder.

"Here, you!"

"Easy!" cried Adams, scrambling to his feet and springing to the rescue. "It's Decker. He's not quite right."

"He's bugs!" snarled the officer. "Butted me in the stomach, he did, like a crazy goat!"

"Please don't hurt him," called a sweet young voice from the doorway. "He doesn't know what he's doing."

"Sneaked out on us, he did," supplemented a masculine voice, tinged with apologetic injury.

"This is Miss Decker, Captain Tracy," said Adams, "and Slocum, the trained nurse. Keep back, Ann," he warned, as the girl hurried to her father.

But he spoke too late. Ann had already seen Barlow.

"Oh!" she gasped. "Oh! How awful!"

She went white and staggered; but when Adams sprang to support her, she evaded his arms and turned her back to the figure at the table.

"So that's what the excitement's about?"

"Did you just hear about it?" questioned Tracy.

"Yes. I—I was tired, and overslept." Her eyes rested for a moment on Adams's face.

"Is your father often like this?" asked Dr. Noble, who had been quietly studying Decker.

"Quiet as a lamb, mostly," asserted Slocum. He slipped his arm through Decker's and headed him toward the hall. "But he's liable to get worked up when they's strangers about."

"Take him into the little room off the hall," directed Tracy. "I want a word with you in a minute. If you'll wait, Miss Decker——"

"Not here, please!" she begged with a shiver.

"In the hall room, then," conceded Tracy.

"What do you want of her?" whispered Adams.

Tracy did not answer; apparently he did not hear. He was watching the gibbering Decker led away from the presence of the death at which he had exulted. The captain's face was hard; and when he turned to Adams, his voice rang with the same quality.

"So that's your childish, harmless maniac?" he sneered.

Adams, still shaken with the gruesome scene, answered sharply:

"I've seen a child go into hysterics over a doll with a broken head. Why don't you get this horror out of sight?"

"All in good time, Mr. Adams; all in good time! Such things ain't pleasant, but they got their use in my business."

"I can't see the use in making death more repulsive than it naturally is."

"Probably you can't see the use in lots of things," retorted the captain. "Got all the papers checked up? No will among them, hey? Then let's go have a talk with Miss Decker."

Tracy stopped at the door to give orders that the reporters be permitted to inspect the death chamber, and momentarily disregarded his companion.

"What do you want to question Miss Decker for?" repeated Adams.

"Maybe she heard something—neighbors do, often."

But Ann had heard nothing; neither had Slocum. Decker, it was useless to question.

"I was up most of the time, too," volunteered Slocum. "He's usually more restless at night."

"Any more than usual last night?" inquired the doctor.

Slocum did not immediately answer. Apparently he was trying to review in detail the incidents of the preceding night.

"No," he said judicially, "I can't say that he was. I've seen him better—and then again I've seen him lots worse."

"And you're sure nothing unusual occurred during the night to disturb him?"

"He don't need to be disturbed. He gets on his ear every once in a while without help."

"But he's not dangerous?" asked Tracy.

"Oh, no!" hastily answered Ann.

Slocum relaxed his face in a slow grin.

"If he was, you wouldn't find *me* on the job. I've seen 'em when they're violent, and I don't want none of it in mine, thank you!"

Tracy eyed the young man speculatively.

"I believe you," he said with something like a sneer. Then he turned sharply to Ann. "What's this bunk about the cuckoo-clock?"

"I don't know—except that father doesn't like cuckoos."

"I guessed as much," was the dry response. "Why don't he?"

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"I don't know," repeated Ann impatiently. "He has the same antipathy for cuckoo-clocks that some men have for cats. They get on his nerves."

"Has he always felt so about them?" asked Dr. Noble.

"Ever since I can remember."

"I don't call it neighborly of Barlow," observed Tracy, "keeping a thing like that to fuss up his old friend."

"He was the landlord and could do as he pleased," answered Ann wearily.

"They had words about it, then?"

"Just as they did about everything else," interjected Adams, shaking his head warningly at Ann.

Tracy intercepted the signal and changed his line of questioning.

"How did Decker come to butt in here?" he demanded of Slocum.

"It was really my fault," explained Ann. "Mr. Slocum is usually on duty nights; I'm supposed to look after father during the day. I thought he was still asleep——"

"Somebody on guard all the time, hey?"

"If you want to call it that. Really, it's just a matter of keeping an eye on him, to see he doesn't get into mischief. Hilda often looks after him when I'm busy."

"But there's always *somebody* on guard?" persisted Tracy.

"Yes."

"Isn't that rather unnecessary, if he's as harmless as you all say?"

"He gets into things, like a kid will," patiently explained Slocum.

Tracy nodded, and Ann resumed:

"Mr. Slocum and I were at breakfast, when an officer rushed in asking who had sneaked past him. I suppose father woke up, saw the crowd outside and came down to see what it was about."

"The officer at the door says he butted in without any warning. He can talk, I suppose?"

"Certainly," answered Ann coldly; "as well as you or I."

"Is this all necessary, captain?" asked Adams indignantly. "It's Miss Decker's father you're talking about, remember."

"Thank you, Fred," murmured Ann, with a suppressed sob.

"Excuse me, Miss Decker," said the police officer quickly. "I didn't mean to hurt you."

"I'm willing to tell you anything I can," she assured him; "but he is my father, you know."

"I know. Slocum, you take Mr. Decker into the other house and make him comfortable. Now, Miss Decker——"

A policeman appeared in the doorway and caught his superior's eye.

"Undertaker's come, captain. He wants to see you a minute—you and the doctor."

Tracy started reluctantly toward the door, then turned to say—

"I'll have to ask you to wait here—both of you."

"You don't mind if I use the phone, I suppose?" asked Adams, showing more amusement than surprise at finding himself under restraint. "I want to get hold of Cousin Henry's lawyer."

"And I want to call up Mr. Welding," added Ann.

"What do you want of him?" demanded Adams with a brusqueness that appeared totally unjustified by her simple statement. "Bertram is your father's lawyer, too."

"But Mr. Welding is my father's friend," she responded with just the slightest accent to mark the distinction.

Adams bit down on his chagrin, in order to provide no further entertainment for the grinning officer; but there was a touch of malice in his voice as he reminded Ann—

"The only phone's in front, where *he* is."

"Oh!" gasped Ann.

"In that case," said Tracy, "you'll both have to wait till we get through, unless I can phone for you?"

"Just give Bertram the news and ask him to come as soon as he can," said Adams, adding the lawyer's telephone number.

"That will do for Mr. Welding, too," Ann answered the captain's inquiring look; "Mr. Franklin B. Welding. You can probably get him at the Harland Hotel."

"I'll phone the first thing," promised Tracy; and, with another grin, he left them.

IGNORING Adams, Ann walked to the window and stood looking out over the smooth lawn. Adams watched her, uncertain whether he should be wise to follow. Posed against the bright background of the sunlit lawn, she looked like a wraith in her white morning dress; and Adams caught himself fearing that she might vanish at his approach.

In person Ann was small and daintily fashioned. Her eyes were big and blue and

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showed a keenness and fire not usually present in eyes of that color; her thick black hair had the sheen of blue steel where the sun struck it; and if her mouth was a trifle too large to be perfect, it proved her to be possessed of stability and good humor. But Ann's real charm lay in the fact that, though she had known trouble and sorrow all the twenty years of her life, she had kept unspoiled that sweet womanliness which appeals to the best in man.

Now it drew Adams to her irresistibly; and, after some further indecision, he joined her at the window. She turned to him with a manner almost beseeching, while her big eyes filled with tears.

"I want to thank you, Fred, for taking father's part so splendidly."

"I didn't do anything," answered Adams; then her friendliness gave him the courage to put the question that had been troubling him: "Ann, excuse me for asking, but did you tell the captain the whole truth about last night?"

"Certainly!"

"And you're sure your father wasn't disturbed?"

"Mr. Slocum said not," she answered readily, though she went pale to the lips. "What—what time was the murder committed?"

"Dr. Noble doesn't seem to know."

Something in his tone prompted her to say quickly—

"I can't tell you how sorry I am."

"Let's not play the hypocrite, Ann," the young man interrupted, with a wry smile. "As a matter of fact, neither of us has any reason to be sorry he's gone."

"No—o," she agreed rather breathlessly.

"The thing that hurts me," pursued Adams, "is that he and I had to fall out so seriously on his last night."

Ann nodded sympathetically, but half turned away, as if disinclined to discuss the quarrel. Adams moved restlessly, then blurted out the question:

"Ann, did you really mean what you said last night—about you and me?"

"Every word of it," she answered firmly, with her eyes on the outside world. "I'm sorry, but there are some things I can't forgive."

"It doesn't take you long to forget," was the bitter retort. "Your first thought was to send for Welding!"

It was a cruel insinuation, and Adams regretted it as soon as made. But he was too angry and hurt to retract.

Ann choked down a sob and turned toward him a face pale with repressed indignation.

"You don't really believe that, Fred," she answered with a calmness more cutting than any rebuke. "You know very well that Mr. Welding is father's intimate friend, and it is only natural that I should want him to know."

"I wasn't trying to interfere with your father's affairs," said Adams stiffly.

"You're always doing it—you and your cousin."

"Sh-h!" whispered Adams, catching at her sleeve and throwing a startled look over his shoulder. "You mustn't say such things here! There's been too much talk already about quarrels between the two families."

Ann stepped back out of his reach, but showed only scorn for his warning. Her indignation was out of bounds now. It shook her voice, while it brought the accusing words tumbling from her lips.

"And why shouldn't there be talk?" she cried. "It's been one continuous quarrel, ever since I was old enough to understand. And if you think, like your Cousin Henry, that you have some hold on us——"

"Stop! Stop! For God's sake!"

"Stop? When I think of what you have done to my father between you——"

Tracy's quiet entrance brought the silence for which Adams had prayed in vain; for, even in the extremity of her indignation, Ann now recognized the peril against which her companion had been trying to warn her. There was that in the official's intent, almost greedy look that instantly checked her half-hysterical outburst.

"What's all this?" asked Tracy casually, although his eyes darted ceaselessly from one to the other.

"Nothing that concerns the police," answered Adams huskily.

"What's been done to your father?" Tracy demanded of the trembling girl. "If you got any complaint to make, I'm the proper person to hear it."

"I've nothing to say," whispered Ann.

"We'll see about that," smiled the captain, reaching behind him to close the door into the hall.

But the door did not close until another soft-footed eavesdropper had slipped into the room. Tracy whirled about angrily;

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but his anger quickly subsided as he recognized the newcomer.

"Hello, Yarrow! What you doing here?"

"Just looking into the case," was the easy response.

"Who for?"

"Mr. Adams."

"What?" demanded that gentleman.

Yarrow nodded complacently, and Tracy began to laugh.

"You mustn't mind Yarrow," he said. "He's always pulling that stuff—thinks he's a sleuth."

This was unkind of the captain, for the investigator had more than once given him a friendly tip that had resulted to the advantage of the police. But Yarrow, smiling benevolently upon all, seemed not to mind.

"I haven't engaged him, and I don't intend to," said Adams shortly.

"Get that, Yarrow?" laughed the captain.

"Hey?"

"Mr. Adams says you're out of a job. So just move on and we'll try to handle this case without you."

"Just a minute." Yarrow had dropped his smile and his air of careless friendliness, and was facing the captain gravely. "Have you warned these young folks that anything they tell you can be used against them?"

"What?" cried Ann in startled dismay.

"That's what I was trying to tell you," muttered Adams.

Tracy choked and swore softly under cover of the momentary confusion.

"You forgot? That's against the law, captain——"

"You get out o' here!" roared Tracy. "Get, before I have you chucked out!"

"All right, captain. All right! I'm not quite deaf, you know." And Yarrow slipped out of the door as quietly as he had come in.

Tracy glared after him, then confronted his intended victims; but Yarrow's warning had come in good time.

"Look here, captain," said Adams angrily, "we want you to understand that we don't like your attitude, and until we see Attorney Bertram you won't get another word out of us. I'm speaking for Miss Decker as well as myself."

It was a daring inclusion on his part; but Ann's quick assent told him that she was at one with him in this.

"All right, but you'll talk later," muttered Tracy with surly triumph.

"Am I to understand that we're under suspicion?"

"Every one in these two houses is under suspicion!" snapped Tracy. "This is an inside job, pulled off by some one who knew the place like he lived here—or I'll turn in my star."

Adams was conscious of a sick feeling at the pit of his stomach; nor did it add to his comfort to see Ann stagger and to hear her agonized whisper—

"My poor father!"

CHAPTER IV

THE INQUEST

IN PREPARATION for the inquest, the Barlow living-room had been hastily put in order. The shades had been rolled up and the windows set wide open. The great library table, at which Barlow had been found dead, had been moved into the bay window, where it would serve as a bench for his honor the coroner. Only the gaping safe remained as a reminder of the recent tragedy.

Nevertheless, there was a sense of oppressiveness about the big, barren apartment which subdued the murmurs of the curious crowd and the reporters, who had come in hope of fresh sensations. Even the police officials moved restlessly about or whispered together in nervous groups as they awaited the arrival of the coroner. To Attorney Bertram, however, their uneasiness had another and more sinister significance.

Had he practised in England, Bertram would probably have been listed as a solicitor and would have maintained dusty chambers in some gloomy Inns of Court; being an American practitioner, he had frequently figured as "of counsel" for substantial clients, without ever actually conducting a case in open court. His forty years of service as counselor had not taught him how to turn to his own use the complicated machinery of the law as administered by the police; and, in the present crisis, despite his eager desire to aid his clients, he acted like a distracted old man rather than the astute, experienced lawyer that he really was.

"I don't like the looks of things," Bertram repeated with irritating persistence. "I

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don't see the reason for all this rush and hurry. It isn't decent."

"I suppose Tracy has his reasons," answered Adams with weary indifference.

"You may be sure he has," retorted the lawyer. "It means he thinks he has a mighty good case already worked up against some one."

"But surely there's no need for Miss Decker to worry?" inquired Franklin Welding, who was lending moral support to Ann and her father.

"Certainly not!" snapped Bertram. "Only I wish to insist upon my advice to both Miss Decker and Mr. Adams: Be careful how you answer any question put to you, and don't say a word more than is necessary."

"Surely you can help them out?" asked Welding.

"I'll do what I can," said Bertram with pursed lips. "Unfortunately, a coroner's inquest is not conducted with the formality that obtains in our regular law courts."

"For my part," muttered Adams, "I don't care how much Tracy hustles things."

"That's not very cousinly, Fred," protested Ann, with a troubled look at the young man.

The entrance of Coroner Jackson claimed attention, and Adams attempted no reply. Indeed, he was too deeply hurt by Ann's apparent preference for Welding to care much about her disapproval.

Coroner Jackson delayed proceedings while he spent several minutes in a whispered conversation with Captain Tracy and Dr. Noble. This fact increased Bertram's nervousness; but Adams' thoughts were more on Ann than upon the serious matter in hand, and he started when Ben bent over him to whisper—

"You can bank on me, sir, till the last bell rings."

"Thanks," answered Adams absently, not at all certain that he knew what Ben meant to convey.

He glanced at Ann, saw that she was seating herself between her dreaming father and the solicitous Welding, and placed himself between Ben and Attorney Bertram. It was not until later that he fully appreciated the significance of this apparently careless grouping.

Captain Tracy, testifying first, merely "set the scene" for the witnesses to follow. So far as his words went, he was the vigilant, unbiased officer; but before he had finished his brief testimony, Bertram was not the only one present who was convinced that the captain was "framing a case."

The impression made by Dr. Noble was quite different. He gave his report for the records of the coroner's office in concise professional terms. Then he turned to the jury with an air of apology.

"In other words, gentlemen," he explained, "Mr. Barlow died of a fracture of the skull, which caused a hemorrhage of the brain. Both the condition of the head and the hemorrhage from the ears show that. The injury was the result of several violent blows on the base of the brain from a heavy blunt instrument."

"Have you any idea as to the nature of the missing weapon?" asked the coroner.

"Nothing conclusive. I can't improve upon Captain Tracy's suggestion that it might have been a broken club, or heavy cane. The wound is a most peculiar one."

"In your opinion was the deceased killed by the first blow?"

"From the condition of his head and his position, I should say that death was, to all practical purposes, instantaneous."

"Have you any reason to believe that the deceased might have committed suicide?"

In spite of the gravity of the occasion, the doctor permitted himself a fleeting smile before he answered:

"The possibility is so remote, Mr. Coroner, that you must pardon me if my reply appears indecently facetious. The only manner in which Mr. Barlow could have caused the wound himself was by repeatedly butting a wall of rough brick with his head, and with the back of his head, at that."

"And a good job, if he had," chuckled a high-pitched voice.

"Father!" gasped Ann.

It had not needed her involuntary cry of horror to identify the speaker. At the brutal outburst, all eyes had turned instinctively to Decker. He met the outraged glances with a dignified air of amused tolerance; but he appeared smugly satisfied with the effect he had produced, and nodded obediently to his daughter's half-tearful plea not to interrupt.

The coroner whispered a moment with Dr. Noble, then resumed his interrogation without comment upon the interruption.

"Dr. Noble, can you approximate the time of the actual decease?"

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"Very nearly," was the ready answer.

Adams, remembering the doctor's earlier evasion of that important question, shot a look at Ann and found her staring at him. Her eyes fell almost at the moment when they encountered his, but he saw that she, too, was vaguly alarmed.

"Our only dependable test," the doctor was saying, "is the extent to which *rigor mortis* has set in. When I first examined the body, at seven forty-five this morning, the *rigor* was complete. Ordinarily this condition follows about six hours after death; but in this case, on account of the extremely hot and humid night, it is my opinion that the extreme *rigor* would not have been reached until about eight hours had elapsed. I should say, therefore, that Mr. Barlow died between eleven and twelve last night."

Again Adams's eyes went involuntarily to Ann, and again he found her regarding him with that look of hidden alarm.

Ben, who had been sitting rigidly by his side, stirred and muttered in his throat.

"As you have already stated that death was almost instantaneous," completed the coroner, "we have reason to believe that the assault was committed during that hour.

"Between eleven and twelve last night," nodded the doctor. "Undoubtedly."

Ben growled again, and Adams laid a warning hand upon his companion's knee.

Following the doctor, Barlow's cook and the maid Hilda were questioned; but their testimony adduced only the negatively important fact that neither of them had heard or seen anything out of the ordinary on the preceding night.

When Ben Devine was called to the stand, he gave Adams's shoulder a passing grip that made the young man wince. Ben wore his customary hang-dog look; but there was about him a strange, hardly concealed excitement, and he eyed the coroner warily, like a fighter watching for a chance to land his favorite blow.

The coroner allowed Ben to proceed without interruption while he explained his employment as Barlow's bodyguard, and described the incidents that had attended his finding of the body of his employer. Then the official began to question him.

"Why did Mr. Barlow expect to be murdered?"

"I dunno—he never said."

"Do *you* know of any one who might think he had reason to kill Mr. Barlow?"

Ben braced himself doggedly for the shock he knew would follow his answer.

"Anybody he ever had dealings with would 'a' been glad to do the job!"

The startled gasp with which his hearers greeted this blunt statement must have gratified Ben, if he had been seeking notoriety; but he was for the moment forgotten in the sensation caused by Decker's cackling approbation:

"Ha! ha! That's the talk!"

The coroner brought his flat hand down upon the table with a *smack* that made his hearers jump.

"If we're interrupted again——"

Ann turned to him appealing eyes in which big tears glistened.

"Please excuse father," she murmured. "He doesn't know what he's saying. If—if you'd let me take him away——"

The coroner turned uncertainly to Dr. Noble; but Tracy interposed and whispered eagerly aside to Jackson. The coroner nodded uncomfortably and addressed Ann.

"Excuse my bruskness, Miss Decker. I understand the situation now, and we'll make allowances for your father."

"If you'd let me take him out," repeated Ann.

The coroner shook his head impatiently.

"Mr. Devine, I must ask you to explain your remarkable statement regarding your late employer."

Ben nodded curtly, as if he had expected to do so; but the coroner's patient questioning elicited nothing more definite than the assertion that Barlow had a mean way that antagonized all with whom he came in contact.

"Can't you give us a concrete example of Mr. Barlow's peculiar effect upon other people?" persisted the coroner.

"Well, there's Mr. Decker."

This time Ben had the sensation all to himself; for Decker, as if stirred to recollection, was cowering behind his daughter. Adams half rose to remonstrate, but Bertram reminded him that he had no right to interfere.

"Mr. Decker?" asked the coroner. "But he and Mr. Barlow were old friends, weren't they?"

"So they said, but they didn't act it. Mr. Decker hates cuckoo-clocks—they seem to drive him nutty. So the boss got that clock. Mr. Decker used to come roaring

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in and tell the boss what he'd do if that clock wasn't stopped. The boss said he'd keep as many clocks as he —— pleased. And every time the bird popped out, he'd stop to listen and grin, and say, 'Wonder how Decker enjoyed that performance?' "

"Did Mr. Barlow appear alarmed when Mr. Decker threatened him?"

"No, sir. He'd just sit back and laugh. Then Mr. Decker'd go over to the safe and twist at the knob and mumble something about a paper."

"What did he want?"

"I dunno—but the boss did."

"What is your opinion regarding Mr. Decker's mental condition?"

"He's crazy as a bug."

"Should you call him dangerous?"

"Not unless he was holding a grudge."

"Such as you think he had against Mr. Barlow?"

Ben nodded grim assent.

"Speak up!" ordered the coroner sharply. "The reporter didn't get your answer."

"He had a grudge, all right," muttered Ben.

Ann sprang up with white cheeks and flashing eyes.

"It's a lie!" she cried.

"Don't interrupt, Miss Decker," said the coroner quietly. "You'll have a chance to testify soon. Mr. Devine, was it Mr. Barlow's custom to send you off to bed, while he stayed alone in this room?"

"Not regularly—maybe two nights a week."

"Was that generally known?"

"Everybody about the place knew it."

"Including Mr. Decker?"

"Sure!"

Ann started to protest again, but Welding pulled her down, and the questioning proceeded to its close.

"What were Mr. Adams's relations with Mr. Barlow?"

"Mr. Adams handled all the boss' business."

"You misunderstood my question. Were Mr. Adams and his cousin on good terms?"

"O' course they scrapped. With the boss, you just naturally had to scrap."

"Did Mr. Barlow make a point of your being present when Mr. Adams was with him?"

"No more'n others."

"Were you present last night?"

"Yes, sir."

"They had another quarrel, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"What about?"

"Dunno. It wasn't my business to rubber."

"But you must have heard something?"

"I didn't get it," was the dogged answer.

"Did they quarrel more violently than usual?"

Ben hesitated almost imperceptibly, then answered—"I was sent off to bed before they got going good."

"Then how did it happen you were on hand to say good night to Mr. Adams when he left?"

Ben visibly staggered, but immediately recovered himself.

"I didn't turn in, your honor—just went up-stairs."

"You didn't feel that you were leaving your employer in danger?"

"With Mr. Adams? No!"

"Did Mr. Adams have any grudge against his cousin?"

"You ain't liable to hold a grudge against a man that's paying you ten thousand dollars a year."

"That's not answering my question."

"No grudge," growled Ben, who was being baited to the point where he wanted to reply with his fists rather than with words.

"You're sure it was just eleven when Mr. Adams left?"

"The cuckoo said so. I ain't sure."

"He didn't come back?"

"Not that I know of."

"Are you sure that your employer was alive at that hour?"

"He was lively enough to cuss me out for asking if he wanted anything before I turned in."

"How did he appear?"

"I didn't see him. The door was shut, and I talked through the door."

"Did you hear anything to indicate that he had any one with him?"

"No, sir."

"If I told you that Mr. Adams murdered his cousin, what would you say?"

"I'd say you're a —— liar!" exploded Ben.

Captain Tracy started forward, but the smiling coroner waved him back.

"That's all. Who's the next witness, Captain Tracy?"

"Miss Decker."

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DEATHLY pale, but quite sure of herself, Ann faced the coroner. Her preliminary testimony developed nothing new, though it was cleverly colored to protect her father. She admitted that Barlow and her father, though old friends with much in common, were often in dispute over matters that seemed to her trivial, among them the annoyance of the cuckoo-clock. She admitted that her father was childish, but she indignantly denied that he was dangerous or even quarrelsome. She declared that her father had no reason to kill Barlow, and asserted that he had no opportunity to do so because he was constantly under watch.

"You heard nothing to alarm you at any time during the night?" asked the coroner.

"Nothing."

"What time did you retire?"

"Shortly after eleven."

"Did you get to sleep immediately?"

"No—not immediately."

Ann flushed as she answered, for she felt Adams's eyes upon her.

"And you're sure you heard nothing unusual?"

"Absolutely sure."

"Why did your father oppose your engagement to Mr. Adams?"

Ann flushed again, but answered promptly—

"I don't know."

"Was that what you and Mr. Adams quarreled about last night?"

"No."

"What was the cause?"

Ann grew paler than usual and hesitated before she answered in a muffled voice:

"I can't answer that. It was a private matter."

"You're sure it could have no bearing on the murder of Mr. Barlow?"

"Yes, I'm sure," was the reply, given so softly that the jurors had to lean forward to catch her words.

"Then what did you mean this morning when you accused Mr. Adams and his cousin of being in league against your father?"

"Did I say that?" gasped Ann.

"You did, in the hearing of Captain Tracy."

"I—I don't remember."

"Come, Miss Decker," said the coroner somewhat shortly. "You're not a child. What did you mean by that accusation?"

"I deny making it," whispered Ann; and her eyes sought Adams's in a mute plea for forgiveness.

The coroner glanced at Tracy, found him smiling, and let the matter rest.

"Why did you try to persuade your father to move away from the Cuckoo's Nest?"

Ann stirred restlessly and looked about her as if she had felt she was being cornered. The coroner had repeated his question before she answered.

"I wanted to get my father away from Mr. Barlow's influence."

"Then you agree with Mr. Devine regarding the effect Mr. Barlow had upon certain people?"

"Yes," answered Ann in a stifled voice.

"Did your father give you the idea that he was afraid to move?"

Ann nodded assent; she could not speak.

"The witness answers 'Yes,'" the coroner informed the reporter. Then he turned again to Ann.

"Are you still engaged to Mr. Adams?"

"No," whispered Ann faintly.

"Who broke the engagement?"

"I did."

"Would you object to telling the jury why?"

"Please——"

Ann could get no further. She stretched her arms appealingly to the coroner, then began to sob almost hysterically. Adams made a hasty movement toward her, but Welding and Bertram anticipated him.

"That will do, Miss Decker," said the coroner hurriedly. "If you prefer to retire——"

"It's gone! It's gone!" cried a shrill cracked voice.

Decker, forgotten during the general interest in Ann's testimony, had crept over to the safe. Now he stood before its open door, repeating his words like a parrot, in a tone alternately wailing and rejoicing.

The coroner frowned but his words were still courteous, even considerate.

"Miss Decker, it is evident that your father is not competent to testify—at least, for the present. You are at liberty to remove him to your own house, if you prefer. I will send Mr. Slocum to you as soon as he has given his testimony."

"Thank you," murmured Ann gratefully.

"I suppose there's no objection to my going with them, your honor?" asked Welding.

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"None at all. You are not required as a witness, I believe?"

Tracy shook his head in response to the coroner's question; and Welding, followed by Adams's jealous eyes, helped the girl remove her father to more restful quarters. She gave Adams another look in passing, but whether her eyes held contrition or warning, he could not tell.

Jackson turned to the reporter.

"Enter on your records that Mr. Decker is excused from testifying," he ordered. "Who's next, captain?"

"Decker's nurse—Slocum," answered Tracy.

Slocum stated that he was an accredited trained nurse, with two years' experience in the State Insane Asylum at Kankakee; and that he had had the care of Decker for seven years, during which his patient had steadily been growing worse. However, Slocum readily corroborated Ann's statements regarding Decker's harmlessness, and strengthened them by repeating his assertion to Tracy that he would not be on the case if he thought otherwise.

"Where was Mr. Decker between eleven and twelve last night?" asked the coroner.

"He wasn't out of my sight from seven o'clock, when I came on duty, till just a few minutes before he sneaked down stairs this morning."

"That doesn't exactly answer my question. Where was Mr. Decker during that hour?"

"I took him up to see Miss Ann about eleven. After that he was in the living-room of the other house—right under my eye."

"All night?"

"Till I put him to bed. I can't tell you just when that was, your honor," Slocum added, anticipating the coroner's question. "I don't pay much attention to time when I'm on watch."

"You're sure you didn't doze off?"

"It's impossible, your honor. I been standing the night watch so long it comes natural to me to keep awake."

"And you had your eye on your patient every minute between eleven o'clock and the time you put him to bed this morning?"

"Yes, sir. I went out on the porch for a smoke once or twice, but he never got out of my sight."

"Then you are sure that Mr. Decker could not have committed the murder, even if he had been so minded?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you hear anything, at any time during the night, that would cause you to think that anything out of the ordinary was occurring in this house?"

"Not a thing, your honor."

"I suppose your hearing is as good as the average?"

"Better, I should say, sir. A man that's been trained among the bad ones, like I been, has to keep his wits about him all the time."

"That's all. An officer will take you to your patient. Call the next witness, captain."

"Mr. Adams to the stand," ordered Tracy.

Officials and spectators turned expectant eyes upon Adams, as if they hoped to learn much from his testimony; but Slocum left the room hurriedly, with the air of one rejoicing to escape so easily.

CHAPTER V

BOUND OVER

AS ADAMS rose to respond to the coroner's summons, Bertram detained him long enough to whisper:

"Be guarded, my dear boy. Be guarded!"

Adams nodded acquiescence; but the weary indifference that had marked his attitude during the opening period of the inquest had given way to an air of determination, almost of desperation. This circumstance was not lost on the jurors; and there was covert whispering among them while Adams answered the routine questions.

"And now, Mr. Adams, tell us just what you did with your time between eight o'clock and midnight yesterday."

"It was about eight o'clock when I reached the Cuckoo's Nest. I was coming to talk over some business with Cousin Henry; but, seeing Miss Decker on the porch, I stopped to talk with her."

"You are engaged to marry Miss Decker?"

"Miss Decker has already answered that question."

"You had a quarrel last night?"

"Yes."

"What about?"

"Personal matters. I must decline to be more definite."

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"Did it in any way involve Mr. Barlow?"

"I must decline to answer."

"You understand, of course, how your refusal to answer may be construed?"

"Yes."

"Go on."

"When Miss Decker dismissed me, I went in to see Cousin Henry. I wasn't feeling any too good-natured, I suppose; anyhow, we differed seriously on several matters, and I was practically ordered out of the house—not that that was anything unusual. It was exactly eleven when I left."

"Was the safe open or closed when you left?"

"Open. We'd been examining some of the papers Cousin Henry kept there."

Adams further testified that he had walked about for a while, and had finally returned to the Cosmos Club about one o'clock. There the night clerk had let him in; but so far as he knew, he could produce no witnesses as to his whereabouts between the hours of eleven and one.

"Why didn't you live here with your cousin?"

"The arrangement wouldn't have suited either of us."

"You agree, then, with the popular opinion regarding your cousin's eccentricities?"

"I do, though it's ungrateful of me to say so. Cousin Henry gave me a job when I was through college; and he's increased my responsibilities every year."

"You expected to be his heir, didn't you?"

"On the contrary, he repeatedly told me that I would not get a dollar from him after his death. He paid me a retaining fee of ten thousand dollars a year, in return for wnich I gave him first call on my services in all matters relating to real estate, in which he was heavily interested. Our arrangement terminated with Cousin Henry's death, so that, as he put it, I had every reason for wanting to keep him alive."

"Did you have any reason to think that your cousin might eventually make you his heir after all?"

"On the contrary, I had more reason to fear that he might terminate our present agreement without warning."

"Were you entirely dependent upon him?"

"Oh, no. I can make a decent living, but it won't amount to any ten thousand a year."

"Then you believe there is extant a will giving the entire estate to charity?"

"Cousin Henry repeatedly told me that that was his intention."

"Do you know what was at the bottom of the frequent quarrels between your cousin and Mr. Decker?"

"Chiefly money matters, I think. Cousin Henry handled their joint affairs, and I know that he often acted in opposition to Mr. Decker's expressed wish."

"Do you mean that your cousin was taking advantage of Mr. Decker's unfortunate mental condition?"

"That I'm not prepared to say."

"Do you think that Mr. Decker cherished a grudge against Mr. Barlow, because of some real or fancied injury?"

"I'm afraid he did—due largely to such minor annoyances as the cuckoo-clock."

"Do you think your cousin had any reason to fear Mr. Decker?"

"Certainly not. I consider Mr. Decker perfectly harmless."

"Why did Mr. Decker oppose your engagement to his daughter?"

"I don't know."

"Why did your cousin favor it, in opposition to her father's wishes?"

"I always thought it was to be contrary."

"What did Miss Decker mean by accusing you and your cousin of being in league against her father?"

"I should prefer to have Miss Decker answer that question."

"She declined to answer."

"So do I."

"How was your yearly retainer of ten thousand dollars paid?"

"In four instalments of two thousand five hundred dollars each, paid on the first of each quarter."

"In checks?"

"Yes."

"Then another quarterly payment of two thousand five hundred dollars would have been due on the first of July?"

"In the ordinary course of events, yes."

"For what purpose, then, did Mr. Barlow offer you last night a check for ten thousand dollars?"

For the first time since he took the stand, Adams betrayed uneasiness. He started at the question, studied Coroner Jackson earnestly, and then turned his eyes upon Captain Tracy and Dr. Noble.

"You need not answer that question," advised Attorney Bertram.

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"I don't intend to answer it," was the cool reply.

"You admit that you were offered such a check?"

"Yes."

"Was that check the cause of the quarrel between your cousin and yourself?"

"It was the result, rather than the cause."

"Could you identify that check, if you saw it?"

"I think so."

"Is this it?"

Coincident with the question, Captain Tracy stepped forward and spread upon the table a slip of paper, which had evidently been crumpled up and then straightened out again.

Adams approached the table and examined the slip of paper as carefully as he was permitted to do, for the captain kept his fingers upon it. Adams smiled grimly as he observed this precaution.

"I should say," he said at length, "that that is the check that was offered to me last night."

"Was your cousin in the habit of making you such generous presents?"

"Not at all. He was very generous in the matter of salary, but he never made me presents."

"What did you do when your cousin offered this check to you?"

"Threw it back in his face."

"Are you speaking figuratively or literally?"

"Literally. I did throw it at him—but I didn't crumple it."

"When did you last see this check?"

"It was still lying on the table when I left the room."

"Was it flat or crumpled?"

"Perfectly flat, just as it had been torn from the check-book."

"You still decline to clear up the several questions which you have evaded or declined to answer?"

"I do."

"That will do."

As Adams resumed his seat between Ben and Bertram, the old lawyer shook his head forebodingly and bent forward to whisper his disapproval of his client's testimony; but Adams sensed too keenly the dramatic suspense of the moment to have eye or ear for any one but the coroner.

"Captain Tracy," said that official, "will you please explain to the jury the circumstances under which this check was found?"

"It was found by Dr. Noble and me, wadded up into a ball and crammed into the mouth of Barlow's corpse."

"Why didn't you complete your testimony when you were on the stand before?" demanded Bertram.

"That's my business!" grinned the captain.

"It's outrageous!" fumed the old lawyer.

The smack of Jackson's palm upon the table recalled Bertram to the fact that his interference was unwarranted, and he contented himself with muttering into the muffling folds of the handkerchief with which he mopped his angry face.

"Dr. Noble," proceeded the coroner, "was this ball of paper placed in the mouth of the deceased before or after death?"

"After. Death usually relaxes the maxillary muscles and allows the jaw to fall. This ball of crumpled paper was merely resting in the open mouth. If it had been forced into the mouth before death, the natural impulse would be to repel it, so that it would be marked by being caught by the teeth."

"That's all, doctor. Next witness, captain."

"Officer Holdane, take the stand."

Officer Holdane proved to be the patrolman on night duty in the neighborhood. He testified to seeing and hearing nothing suspicious about the Cuckoo's Nest at any time during the preceding night, then added:

"About eleven-thirty I was standing across the street when I saw a light on the porch of this house, like some one was lighting a match. I made out a man standing at the rail, and I could see the fire of his cigaret."

"Could you see the man's face?"

"Yes, sir, I saw it when the match blazed up—it was Mr. Slocum. I've had a word once or twice with him nights."

"There was nothing unusual about Mr. Slocum's smoking on the porch?"

"No, sir. He often comes out for a pill."

"Did he appear uneasy, or watchful, or in any way different?"

"No, sir."

"Did you see any one else about the place?"

"Yes, sir. I saw a man coming out the gate just before Mr. Slocum's match blazed up."

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"At what time was this?"

"Just about eleven-thirty."

"Did you recognize the man?"

"It was Mr. Adams."

"You are well acquainted with Mr. Adams?"

"Well enough to recognize him on a clear night like last night."

"Which way did this man turn, on leaving the house?"

"To the left, sir. I noticed it particularly because most folks—'specially at that time o' night—turn to the right."

"That will do, officer." The coroner consulted aside with Captain Tracy, then said, with a glint of malicious laughter in his eyes: "Mr. Bertram, we'll give you a chance now. Take the stand, please."

Bertram showed both confusion and indignation at the unexpected summons; but, after a momentary hesitation, he seated himself before the big table and submitted meekly to the preliminary questioning.

"You have been legal adviser to Mr. Barlow for years, I believe?" pursued the coroner.

"I have."

"In that capacity, didn't you recently draw up for your late client a will naming Mr. Adams as the chief beneficiary?"

Bertram rose from his seat and faced the coroner with a dry smile: "Your honor, I shall exercise my privilege as an attorney and decline to answer that question."

"You're excused, Mr. Bertram. Next witness, captain."

"That's all, Mr. Coroner."

"Mr. Adams, do you care to alter or amplify your testimony in any way?"

Adams had been staring at Officer Holdane with a puzzled frown. He started at the coroner's question, but shook his head in negation.

In summing up the evidence, Coroner Jackson took the ground that Barlow's murder had been proved, and that the only question before the jury was as to the identity of the murderer. He emphasized the facts that Barlow was notoriously quarrelsome, and that he had quarreled continually with his old friend and neighbor, Decker, and with his cousin and natural heir, Adams; but the coroner also laid stress upon the fact that Decker's alibi had not been assailed.

"Mr. Adams himself has admitted his inability to establish his whereabouts from eleven last night until approximately one o'clock this morning. Mr. Adams has further admitted that he left the deceased after an unusually violent quarrel, the nature of which he declines to explain; although he admits that the quarrel partly concerned the check that was found crammed into the dead man's mouth. By his own testimony, supported by that of the man Devine, he left this house at eleven; but Officer Holdane has testified that he saw Mr. Adams leave about eleven-thirty. Mr. Adams has further evaded, or flatly refused to answer, questions intended to throw upon this case a light that no one else can give. And finally, Attorney Bertram, after several attempts to protect Mr. Adams while on the stand, has exercised his professional privilege and declined to state whether or no Mr. Adams is named as chief beneficiary in his cousin's will.

"It is your duty to weigh these several facts without bias, and to render a verdict that will assist the state to bring the murderer to justice. You may now retire to the dining-room to consider your verdict."

Probably the only eyes in the room that did not follow the retiring jurors were those of the man most concerned in their verdict. Frederick Adams sat staring straight ahead of him, pale but quiet, with a look in his eyes that baffled those who sought to read his thoughts. It was not until Bertram leaned over him that he showed any interest in the possible findings of the jury.

"I'm afraid you're in for it, my boy," whispered the attorney nervously. "Jackson's summing up was a masterly marshaling of the facts against you; and if ever I saw 'guilty' stamped on a jury's faces, I saw it in the countenances of those men."

"They can't hang me on the verdict of a coroner's jury," answered Adams wearily.

But Ben, too, was inclined to pessimism, and Adams was forced to endure their surmises and forbodings during the brief time that the jury was out.

"That's bad," croaked the attorney, as the jurymen filed back to their seats. "They wouldn't have agreed on an open verdict so soon."

Attorney Bertram was quite correct in his surmise. The jury gave it as their opinion that Henry Barlow had met his death at the hands of his cousin, Frederick Adams, as a result of being brutally beaten

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upon the head with an unknown weapon, and directed that the said Frederick Adams be held to the grand jury.

Even though it had been anticipated, the verdict created a sensation. Apparently the least moved of all was Adams. When he heard himself accused, he gave a little nod, as who should say, "I expected it." And his face bore a faint smile of satisfaction, almost of triumph.

CHAPTER VI

ANN'S COMFORTERS

PRAIRIEVIEW was divided on the question whether Ann Decker had done right in sacrificing her youth to the care of her queer father; but it was at one in admiring her devotion to him. Ann herself considered that she was doing only her duty.

Perhaps Ann could not fully appreciate the extent of her sacrifice, for her mother had died too early for her to know the greatness of that loss. By the time she entered her teens, Ann had already assumed the management of the household and the guardianship of her failing father. As a result, her love for him was maternal rather than filial; and she found her reward in the knowledge that he loved her, in his queer way, and clung to her as the one stable thing in his unbalanced world.

Adams had come into her narrow life so naturally, and with so kindly an appreciation of the peculiarities of her situation, that she had felt no qualms in dividing the devotion formerly given to her father alone. The two young people had almost grown up together, for Ann was but a young girl when they first became acquainted; and for some years they had been more like brother and sister than possible lovers. If either had thought upon love, it had been to put the thought out of mind as impossible, at least for the present.

Oddly enough, it was the two quarrelsome old men who had finally brought matters to a crisis by differing on the subject. Decker, during one of his saner periods, had angrily accused Ann of encouraging the attentions of Adams; while concurrently Barlow had commended his cousin for his good taste.

When the two young people were thus apprized that their friendship had grown into love, they were for a time supremely happy, in spite of Decker's continued disapproval. Indeed, both felt his opposition less portentous of unhappiness than Barlow's congratulations. But they believed that their love was too strong and deep-rooted to be shaken by any winds of their little world, and blissfully planned for the future.

Their sudden quarrel had come like a cataclysm which in twenty-four hours had wrecked the structure of love and trust and hope that they had been years in building. And it had left them both so hurt and shaken that it was, perhaps, not unnatural that both should be cruel where once they had been kind.

It was, however, with no deliberate intention of hurting Adams that Ann had kept Welding at her side during the inquest and accepted his offer to accompany her when Coroner Jackson permitted her to take her father home. Her sole thought at the time was to get the unfortunate man away before he should further attract attention that might well lead to suspicion; and she welcomed Welding's company because she believed he had a soothing influence on her father.

As it happened, Decker appeared to lose all interest in the murder when once he was at home; and, when Slocum shortly joined them, he cheerfully agreed to his nurse's suggestion that he take his daily nap. So Ann was left with Welding, and her fears.

Welding exerted himself to hearten the girl and distract her thoughts; and he showed himself not inept as a sympathetic friend. It was a delicate rôle he played, for Ann continually reverted to the question, "Who could have done it?" Apparently she failed to realize that what evidence she had heard suggested both her former lover and her father as possible murderers; and Welding had the difficult task of reassuring her as to the one without implicating the other. And time had dragged into eternity when Attorney Bertram finally came to them.

Tragedy was written large in the lawyer's perspiring face, and his voice shook perceptibly as he said:

"It's good news and bad, Miss Ann. They returned a verdict of murder against —Mr. Adams!"

"Fred? Then my father—is safe!" sobbed the girl.

Instantly she rebuked herself for her selfishness and shed indignant tears over Adams's plight; but it was evident that she did not appreciate the seriousness of his

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position. Whatever the cause of their recent quarrel, she refused to entertain even the possibility of Adams' guilt.

"It's absurd!" she declared, as she vigorously dried her eyes. "Just because he quarreled with his cousin——"

She started, stared at her companions with horror-filled eyes, and burst into tears again.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" she sobbed. "It's all my fault! Captain Tracy overheard us quarreling."

"Nonsense!" interrupted Welding with intentional sharpness. "You made it very plain that that was a personal matter."

"Quite true, my dear, quite true," added Bertram, furtively wiping his own eyes.

"It gave Captain Tracy the idea," she persisted miserably.

"You flatter Tracy!" snapped the lawyer. "He wouldn't know what to do with an idea, if you gave him one." And Bertram briefed for them the evidence offered after their departure.

"It's a plain case of trying to railroad an innocent man into the penitentiary—or worse!" the lawyer sputtered indignantly. "Adams is no more guilty than any one of us three but there was more notoriety in laying the blame upon a potential millionaire than upon some unknown, and Adams had to suffer for Tracy's vanity."

"You don't anticipate any trouble in getting him out on bail?" queried Welding.

"Certainly not! I have some little influence with the bench."

"Yet we often hear of perfectly innocent men being sent to prison for life, or even——"

Ann could not finish the sentence.

"They're very exceptional cases, my dear," Bertram comforted her.

"To my mind," said Welding, "the worst thing against him is the strange disappearance of his cousin's will."

"That's the one thing that worries me," acknowledged the lawyer. "If the will had been found, I'm confident that it would bear out Mr. Adams's statement that he had far greater expectations from Barlow alive than from Barlow dead. Even had he been the murderer——"

"Don't!" shivered Ann.

"Only for the sake of argument, my dear," rejoined the lawyer. "If Mr. Adams *had* done it, he certainly would not have been so foolish as to bring suspicion upon himself by destroying the will. But with the will missing, there's always a suspicion that Barlow had made some change which would give Mr. Adams a motive for putting his cousin out of the way."

"I wish you wouldn't keep bringing that up as a possibility," protested Ann.

"In such a case," said Welding with grave kindness, "it's unwise to overlook anything that might be possible."

"True! True!" assented Bertram.

"But you're Mr. Barlow's lawyer," objected Ann. "You surely know what's in his will."

"My dear young lady, I've drawn so many different wills for him that I'm utterly confused when I try to guess what might be the tenor of the one that he finally decided on. But we must face the fact that the disappearance of the will undoubtedly directs the eye of suspicion toward Mr. Adams."

At a sign of protest from Ann, the lawyer broke off and rose to his feet.

"Pardon the garrulity of a puzzled, woolheaded old lawyer, my dear," he apologized. "I assure you that I'm as certain of Mr. Adams' ultimate vindication as I can be of anything in this uncertain world. I must be off now and see about bail. I must also retain an experienced criminal lawyer to take charge of the defense. Evans is our man, I think."

"I suppose he means well," sighed Ann, when she returned from accompanying the lawyer to the door; "but, oh dear! I can't help wishing that Fred had another lawyer!"

"He's a funny old fusser," agreed Welding, "but I'm sure he must be thoroughly competent, for all that, or Barlow wouldn't have retained him so long."

"I suppose so." Ann spoke somewhat shortly, for Welding had unconsciously reminded her that no one would ever apply the term "thoroughly competent" to her unhappy father.

Poor Ann! She was just beginning to realize how alone and lonely she really was. The father whose care it should have been to shelter and protect her, was become himself a care, kept from the madhouse only by the unceasing vigilance of his daughter. The lover who would gladly have stood between her and all sorrow and danger, had been turned against her under such circumstances that she could not have accepted his help, even had he been free to give it. Thus was she left to be comforted by her father's

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friend, and counseled by her father's lawyer.

Nor had she any friends of her own sex to whom she might turn. In her unselfish devotion to her father, she had shut herself away from the world which would not admit him to its activities. There was no true friend to put tender arms about her and encourage her to the rare indulgence of a good cry.

Welding appreciated her position, as far as a man might, and delayed his departure in the hope that some neighbor would run in to take his place as comforter. And when presently the maid entered with a card on a tray, he prepared to take his leave.

" 'Yarrow & Hart,' " Ann read aloud; " 'investigators and analysts.' What do they want with me, Hilda?"

"It's only one, ma'am—the Hart person. It's something about Mr. Adams."

"Oh!" Ann hesitated, then nodded to the waiting maid. "He may be from the Mr. Yarrow who was so kind this morning," she said to Welding,

"It's some detective, I fancy," he answered, as he settled back in his chair.

"Detective?"

"Analyst, if you don't mind," boomed a deep voice from the doorway, and J. Valentine Hart stood bowing before them.

THE self-styled analyst made an imposing figure, such as any department store would be proud to have pose at the head of its main aisle and direct the "carriage trade." He had a smooth, baby-pink-and-white face, a deep but oddly monotonous voice, and an air that erred on the side of perfection. His clothes, too, were perfect, even to the minutest detail; and he wore them as one accustomed to them. But the department store was his proper setting. His person and his manner were too large for an ordinary room, even though it had the space of the Decker living-room.

Ann realized this in the brief time required to introduce Welding and invite Hart to be seated; and she caught herself wondering whether this man were really as big as he appeared.

"If you'll permit me to get at once to my business," began Hart.

"Please do."

"Thank you. My associate, Mr. Yarrow, endeavored to arrange with Mr. Adams this morning for an investigation into his cousin's unhappy death."

"And Mr. Adams refused?"

"At the time, yes. But we thought——"

"I'm afraid I can't help you," answered Ann a bit confusedly. "I have no influence with Mr. Adams."

"I can hardly believe that," responded Hart with what, from his air, was evidently intended to be a compliment.

"Really," began Welding.

"Pardon me, Mr. Welding," interrupted Hart blandly, "but my business is with Miss Decker."

"Mr. Welding is my father's friend," said Ann somewhat coldly.

"Certainly! Certainly. Miss Decker, I offer you the services of Yarrow & Hart in investigating this murder."

"But why me? I've already told you that I have no influence with Mr. Adams."

"We're asking you to commission us. Your engagement to Mr. Adams——"

Ann flushed, but answered coldly—

"We are no longer engaged."

"I've taken the liberty of assuming that you won't let a mere lovers' quarrel interfere with your duty, in view of Mr. Adams's unfortunate position."

Ann was for the moment stricken dumb by the cool audacity of the analyst; but Welding angrily hitched forward in his chair and spoke for her.

"Come, come, sir! You're altogether too presumptuous for a man seeking employment."

"I'm asking Miss Decker to employ me," was the calm rejoiner.

Welding was about to make a sharp retort, but Ann checked him. She sat straight up, with her hands tightly clenched in her lap, and faced Hart with much the same manner that she had showed to the coroner; but now there was in either pale cheek a bright spot, that came and went with her breath.

"Do let's hear the man out," she said, with a touch of amused tolerance that would have discomfited most men.

"Thank you," said Hart gravely. "Then I'm to understand that you believe Mr. Adams innocent?"

"Certainly! Don't you?"

"I know he is."

"Oh!" gasped Ann, falling back against her chair.

"Where's your proof?" demanded Welding.

Hart smiled, and shook his head. "I

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know he's innocent because it's impossible for him to be guilty."

"Oh!" sneered Welding. "A popular fiction detective! You deduce a mouse when you see a frightened elephant."

"I'm an analyst," admitted Hart.

"But you said he was innocent!" cried Ann.

"That's what I wish you to commission me to prove."

"Don't you see his game, Miss Decker?" asked Welding, with a scornful smile at the analyst. "He hasn't a scrap of proof; but he learns of your former engagement to Adams, and comes bluffing in here to work upon your sympathies."

"I'll admit," said Hart calmly, "that it's more usual in our profession to wait for clients to come to us. But Yarrow & Hart have their own methods. We don't take every case——"

"I believe you," muttered Welding with a meaning grin.

"But when we do find one that seems to suit our peculiar talents," proceeded the undisturbed Hart, "we consider it our duty as well as our privilege to volunteer our services."

"And will you guarantee to prove Mr. Adams innocent?"

Hart shook his big head gravely.

"We can guarantee nothing, Miss Decker, except a careful and honest investigation."

"That's great!" chuckled Welding. "What experience have you had in murder cases?"

"None. That's why we have interested ourselves in this case."

"Well, upon my word!" laughed Welding.

With a movement that was the acme of polite snubbing, Hart turned his shoulder to the laugher and addressed the wondering girl.

"Miss Decker, when a man's life or liberty is in peril, every minute is precious."

" 'Time is money,' " gaily quoted Welding.

"Please!" Ann silenced the giber with a gesture.

"If you would give us authority to go ahead on your account, until we can get in touch with Mr. Adams——"

"Why do you need authority, as you call it?"

"We must have some assurance that the necessary expenses will be paid."

"I told you so!" Welding could not refrain from muttering.

"We don't undertake cases on speculation," explained Hart with the first sign of irritation that he had shown.

"Oh, I don't know what to do!" cried Ann, twisting her hands nervously.

"If you'll take my advice," said Welding, "you'll do nothing without consulting either Adams or Bertram."

"That is to say, do nothing at all," retorted Hart, turning his calm gaze upon Welding. "Mr. Adams refuses to take the necessary steps; Mr. Bertram appears to be incapable of doing so."

"Of course something ought to be done," hesitated Ann.

"This is no matter for a girl to meddle with," said Welding, firmly. "And, if Mr. Hart will pardon my bluntness, I'm quite certain that you would accomplish nothing by employing a pair of inexperienced theorists."

"I'm afraid that's my opinion, too, Mr. Hart," sighed Ann. "But thank you for coming to me."

Hart rose instantly, with no appearance of being disappointed; and his courtesy was as perfect as if he had received a commission beyond his expectations.

"It's been a pleasure to meet you, Miss Decker. If you should later change your mind, please command us. Good day to you, Mr. Welding."

Welding could not forbear one parting shot—

"Are you still convinced of Adams' innocence?"

"Perfectly, sir. As to how it will be proved—time will tell."

CHAPTER VII

A DEADLOCK

IN HIS cell in the county jail, Frederick Adams sat on the edge of his cot, waiting. He had been waiting since the coroner's jury brought in its verdict about four o'clock in the afternoon; it was now ten in the morning of the following day.

During that time he had heard nothing at all from his friends or his lawyer. It had been his understanding that Bertram was to take immediate steps to get him out on bail, and he supposed it was that business that was detaining the lawyer. He was not worrying about the delay—legal processes are proverbially slow—but he did feel neglected and out of sorts.

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A constant procession of reporters persisted in quizzing him while refusing to give him any information in return. That in so doing they were obeying Captain Tracy's strict orders, mattered nothing to him. He did not yet realize that, as a prisoner, he had lost his liberty of thought as well as of action. In retaliation for being kept uninformed of outside events, he had steadfastly refused to pay any attention to the newspaper men; so when he heard the guard unlocking the door in the outer corridor, evidently to admit another visitor, he did not even look up.

The cell in which Adams was confined was one of several grouped in a rectangle in the center of the cell room. Its barred front faced upon a barred corridor, scarcely shoulder wide; beyond that was a broader corridor, whose farther wall was the stone wall of the jail. Ordinarily, visitors were admitted to the outer corridor, and prisoners were let out into the narrow inner one; the intervening bars, and the presence of the watchful guard, held the prisoners safe, while allowing them a factitious freedom.

Even this slight liberty had been denied to Adams. He had not been permitted to leave his cell since he first entered it; but, knowing nothing of the usual practise, he had accepted his close confinement as customary. Now he was roused from his lethargic musings by an indignant protest, made with all the anger conceivable in that familiar voice.

"Aren't you going to let Mr. Adams out of his cell to confer with his attorney?"

"Sorry, sir, but that's the orders," was the gruff response.

"It's outrageous!" sputtered the visitor.

"Bertram!" cried Adams, starting up from his cot.

He sprang to the bars with an eagerness that surprised himself. He was also surprised to observe the shakiness of the hand that he put through the bars to greet the lawyer, and the quaver in his own voice.

"Well! I began to think you'd deserted me!"

"Nothing like that, my boy! Nothing like that!" the lawyer reassured him, evidently trying to make talk. "It's my first experience with a murder case, and there's been a hitch, I'm sorry to say."

"A hitch? You don't mean——"

The lawyer nodded almost sheepishly.

"Captain Tracy absolutely refuses to release you on bail."

"Tracy? Why, he can't."

"He's perfectly within his rights; though there's no doubt in my mind but that the captain is feeding his ambition at your expense."

"Do the police control the judiciary?"

"Believe me, my dear boy, I've used every influence—appealed to every judge I could reach. But the police are practically absolute until the grand jury has formally indicted you."

"And when will that be?" demanded Adams eagerly.

"Less than a week, probably."

"I can get out on bail, then?"

Bertram pursed his lips and slowly shook his head.

"I'm sorry, but I'm afraid your attitude at the inquest will be held against you."

"But I'm innocent!" protested the prisoner.

"You refused to try to prove it!" was the significant retort.

Adams took a turn about his narrow cell before he spoke again.

"You mean there's no way of getting me out of here till I've been acquitted?"

"I'm sorry to admit it, but there's none."

"But it may be months!"

"I can give you some hope on that score. Captain Tracy is planning to rush your case through just as quickly as he can manage it."

"He can't move too quickly to suit me!" snapped the prisoner pugnaciously.

"I'm very glad to see you taking that attitude, my boy. It was your own testimony that clinched the case against you. If you'll let us twist some of your statements around so they won't sound so self-accusatory——"

"Impossible!"

Bertram gripped the bars and caught his breath.

"Are you trying to commit suicide?"

"Life is as sweet to me as it is to any man."

"Then, for Heaven's sake——"

"It's no use, Bertram. I refuse to change my testimony in any particular."

"You've no objection to my advertising a reward for the murderer, I hope?"

"I certainly have!"

Bertram relaxed his grip on the bars and wiped his forehead perplexedly.

"Well," he sighed, "it's too much for me.

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We'll have to see if Evans can't make you listen to reason."

"Who's Evans?"

"The lawyer I've retained to handle your case. One of the best criminal lawyers in the State."

"You're a lawyer, aren't you?"

"I never was connected with a criminal case in my life. My work is as far apart from that as the two poles!"

"Let Evans go, Bertram. I don't want him."

"But at least you'll let him see you? He can tell you how innocent men are railroaded to prison, even to——"

"I'm getting some experience in that line myself, thank you."

"But you don't understand!" wailed the lawyer, reduced almost to tears by his client's suicidal obstinacy.

"Listen to me, Bertram! I forbid you to do anything whatever except to scheme your hardest to get me out on bail."

"The court will appoint counsel to represent you."

"The court can appoint all the lawyers it likes; but without my cooperation, I guess they won't accomplish much."

"If I could only get track of the missing will," muttered the distracted lawyer. "I suppose," he added with a trace of sarcasm, "you have no objection to my endeavoring to have you declared the heir?"

"No," laughed Adams, "I'll give you *carte blanche* there."

The old lawyer surveyed his contrary client with a sadness that was tinged with perplexity.

"If I didn't know you so well," he said slowly, "I should say that you were concealing something from me."

"Perhaps I am," grinned Adams.

Bertram leaned forward hopefully.

"About the murder, or the will?" he whispered.

But Adams only grinned and shook his head.

When he was alone the prisoner paced the brief space of his cell with bowed head and knitted brows. Too late, he remembered that he had utterly forgotten to ask for news, had even forgotten to inquire about Ann. He made another unsuccessful attempt to persuade the guard to bring him the papers. Finally, in sodden despair, he flung himself down on his narrow cot and presently fell into a light doze.

"LADY to see you!" called the guard, rattling the barred door. Adams sat up on the edge of the cot, rubbing his eyes, and staring sleepily in the direction of the voice.

"A—lady?" he questioned doubtingly. "Ann! You? You—here?"

She nodded mutely and put her hand through the bars. In his joy of seeing her, Adams forgot that they had quarreled.

"Ann!" he whispered, holding her hand against his breast. "I never thought you'd come!"

"That's what I told Mr. Bertram," she replied with a curious air of uneasiness.

Adams dropped her hand and turned away.

"I'm a fool!" he muttered bitterly. "I might have known you wouldn't come of your own free will."

"Fred—please!"

He turned on her scornfully.

"Oh, I know you're kindhearted enough!" he sneered. "But I'm not looking for sympathy. I'm wide awake now, and I distinctly remember that we have quarreled."

The scorn in his voice caused her to bite her lip and wonder how it was that every least thing seemed to foment their quarrel.

"Mr. Bertram thought," she proceeded quietly, "that I still had some influence with you. I wish I had, Fred. I'd do my utmost to make you give up your foolish attitude." She leaned close to him, so that he could read the real terror and pity in her eyes. "Fred, I honestly believe that every person in Chicago thinks you've already convicted yourself."

"If you feel so," said Adams roughly, "what are you doing here?"

The girl shrank away. Her pain and distress were so evident that the watchful guard took a hasty step toward her.

"I came," she responded softly, "because I do believe in you."

"What!"

He caught at the restraining bars and stared into her pale face.

"My God!" he muttered. "I believe you do."

"Fred," she whispered, "don't you understand? It's one thing to quarrel—as we had to—but to believe you guilty of murder——"

"Thanks! That helps," he answered with a look more eloquent than his words.

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"And you'll let me tell Mr. Bertram?"

"That I'll do nothing unless he can get me out on bail."

"But at least you'll see the lawyer, Mr. Evans?"

Adams shook his head in obstinate refusal.

"Please, Fred—for my sake!"

Adams pressed close to the bars and looked at her with a faint smile on his lips.

"Do you really mean that?" he asked quietly.

"For my sake, as a friend," she faltered.

"I thought so," he responded, with the smile growing plainer. "You never were good at deception, Ann."

"I wish I were a better actress," she sighed.

Adams shrugged his shoulders. "You weren't acting when you told me the best thing I could do was to forget you as quickly as possible."

The girl turned away abruptly as if admitting that she had failed in her mission. For a moment she stood absently poking the tip of her slipper into a crack in the stone floor, and Adams let his gaze rest hungrily upon her while he dreamed of past joys and shattered hopes.

She flushed somewhat as she looked up and felt the intensity of his gaze.

"I must be getting back," she said uneasily; yet she seemed in no hurry to go.

"How is your father?" asked Adams.

Ann answered with some embarrassment—

"It sounds heartless, I know, but he really seems better—if it weren't for the cuckoo-clock."

"Does the clock bother your father as much as ever?"

"More, if anything."

"I'll send word to Ben to stop it."

"Don't say anything till after tomorrow," she suggested. "It's his—funeral. Do you suppose they'll let you go?"

"Probably not," was the bitter answer, "unless they want to try the old test on me and see if the dead man's wound flows when I come near him."

"Oh! How can you?" shuddered Ann.

"Even my short term has hardened me," was the unsatisfactory reply.

"I wonder," said Ann, and fell to poking the crack again.

Whatever her feeling toward him, thought Adams, she no longer appeared to shun his company. On the contrary, she appeared loath to go; though just what was holding her he could not decide.

"So you're adamant?" she asked, looking up with a wistful smile.

"Absolutely."

"Would—would it help you if I came to see you occasionally?"

"No, you mustn't!"

"Good-by, then."

She gave him her hand, and looked up at him with swimming eyes.

"I think you're the bravest man——"

"And the most foolish," he finished lightly.

He watched her departure with a cheerful, almost mocking smile; but when the guard repassed his cell, Adams lay face down upon his narrow cot, with his head muffled in his gray blanket.

CHAPTER VIII

YARROW & HART

YARROW & HART, respectively investigator and analyst, were a strange pair to set up a private detective agency. For a time their partnership had been tentative and unofficial. It had consisted chiefly in violent quarrels over the proper method of handling the various notorious cases with which a big city periodically entertains its newspaper readers; and their final determination to join forces had been the result of a startlingly successful attempt to prove their several contentions by actual investigation and analysis.

They had now been in partnership for three years, and, though they were still compelled to engage in many an unremunerative "paper chase," and to seek clients who had not heard of them, they were kept sufficiently busy to be encouraged to continue.

They might have done much better, but for the fact that both Yarrow and Hart openly pooh-poohed scientific or laboratory methods of detection. Finger-prints, blood tests, microphones, and all the other paraphernalia of the modern detective of fact and fiction, were to them mere buncombe; largely, it must be admitted, because neither of them possessed the training to appreciate or apply such methods. Yarrow declared that he asked no better instruments than his six senses; and Hart maintained

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that the only exact science was accountancy, and that any problem could be solved by treating motives and deeds like credits and debits, and making the books balance.

One very valuable asset the partners possessed: they believed in themselves. They went at every problem with a supreme faith in their ability, and utter disregard of personal consequences, and a bulldog determination to make good by honest means; and these qualities combined have brought success to greater bunglers than Yarrow & Hart.

The partners had little need of offices, for they possessed few records and no paraphernalia; but for the accommodation of their clients, they made their headquarters in one of the few old buildings remaining in the "Loop" district. Their offices comprised three small connecting rooms which were arranged as a common waiting-room, with a private office for each partner. Usually, however, the connecting doors stood open.

Thus, as Yarrow entered the waiting-room and stood by the scarred table drawing off his black gloves, his partner had only to raise his eyes from his computations to give him greeting. Yarrow, who had a blatant contempt for the little niceties of dress, always donned black gloves when he attended a funeral. He explained, in extenuation, that it made him look more at home, and as if he had a personal interest in the affair.

"Well," asked Hart, "did you discover anything?"

"Nothing new. I been telling you all along it was Decker did it. If you'd seen him carry on, I guess even you'd seen light through the knot-hole."

"Did he break out again?"

"He did—bad! It was a big funeral, of course—lots of rubber-necks. Got a good seat, though."

"Was Adams there?"

"Nope. Tracy was swelling round like he had the whole case tied up in his pocket-handkerchief."

"What about Decker?"

"Miss Decker was there with Bertram. They kept Decker out of sight, though I thought I heard him yip once when the cuckoo-clock went off. The services was short as they could decently make 'em—Tracy's orders, I heard. Just as they was coming down the steps—everybody with hats off, and some of the fool women sniveling—Lord knows why—out pops Decker from his side of the house, with Slocum after him. He'd 'a' jumped on the coffin, I believe, if he could; bumped into it and near upset it, as it was. And howl! He howled like the house was afire and he was the alarm."

"What did he say?"

"I'd ask you to guess, only you'd never do it. 'The cuckoo next! The cuckoo next!' he kept yelling; and then he'd go off in his silly cackle."

"How did the crowd take it?"

"'Poor crazy fellow!'" sniveled Yarrow in disgusted mimicry.

"And the police?"

"They hustled him back home—back home, mind you, instead of chucking him into the cell next to Adams."

"Don't you think it's rather queer that you should be the only one to take Decker's crazy outburst as proof of his guilt?"

"No, I don't. And if you can't see it——"

"Well, I can't."

"Then God help us!"

In a small rage, Yarrow tossed his tightly-balled gloves upon the table, flung himself into a chair, put up his feet, and began to fill a rank old brier pipe. Seeing that they were in for one of the long arguments by means of which they usually developed their cases, Hart pushed aside his figures, faced about at his desk, and lighted a cigaret. For they were at odds in their methods of "taking tobacco," as in most things. Hart abhorred his partner's strong-smelling pipe, while Yarrow professed to see signs of degeneracy in a man who could habitually smoke monogrammed cigarets.

For years Hart had held a responsible position as a cost accountant with one of the great Chicago department stores; in thought and manner of life he was still a methodical accountant. During his strictly kept office hours he balanced the frailties and passions of human nature with a cold-blooded preciseness, the very unhumanness of which occasionally produced results that secretly surprised him. At home he was a kind but stupid husband and father, and a commonplace member of a circle of commonplace friends. His greatest recreation was to study the passing throng, as viewed from the vantage point of a hotel rotunda or a club window.

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Born and bred in Chicago, Yarrow had been a jack at all the trades that a great city offers to the unskilled worker; for he had only an ordinary education and no training for any particular line of work. He had, however, a personal and reliable knowledge of his home city—its localities, its people, and its ways; and this in itself was no poor training for the profession which he had finally elected to follow.

All his life Yarrow had been handicapped by deafness, for that was not merely an affectation. He was naturally good-natured and companionable; but, because he did not care to be continually reminded of his affliction, he was much given to wandering about the streets alone at all hours, renewing or amplifying his knowledge of some particular locality.

For Yarrow was the ferret or bloodhound of the queer partnership; and like an old hunting-dog he kept himself in trim by following imaginary trails, when there was no real business in hand. At running down a given scent, or picking up stray bits of information, he was uncannily clever; but he was utterly incapable of arranging his facts in any sort of logical order, or of making deductions from them. Naturally, then, he secretly considered himself particularly good at that very thing, and in consequence had many bitter and useless controversies with his partner.

The maltreatment of the funeral gloves, and the production of the noisome pipe, indicated that Yarrow was again in a controversial mood; and Hart, with inward joy, girded himself for the argument which should determine their attitude on the Barlow case.

"NOW try to forget your fool theories, and look at things as they are," was Yarrow's impatient beginning. "I can see you're itching to hustle me out on a wild-goose chase, but the case's done, so far as I'm concerned."

"Then you refuse to accept the evidence produced at the inquest?"

"No—that's partly what I'm going by. I did think for a time it was Adams's job—he had the motive and the chance. That man Ben thinks so, too."

"You think Ben was listening outside Barlow's door that night?"

"Yes," said Yarrow, as if the admission hurt him; "and he must 'a' heard something that would tell against Adams, or he'd 'a' given it up."

"Precisely. What's his grudge against Decker?"

"Not being a squirrel, he's shy o' nuts, that's all."

"Why did you decide that Adams didn't do the job?"

"His own testimony. He was covering up something. They was all covering up something, —— them!" Yarrow's irritation burst forth in profanity.

"Again I must agree," assented Hart. "It's as pretty a case of blind tag as we've run against."

"I think Adams was lying in spots," proceeded Yarrow; "only I can't exactly spot the spots. Anyhow, he knew what he was doing, even when he turned me down."

"I'm afraid you let that prejudice you against him in the first place."

"I did, but it didn't hinder me tipping him off that he was being pumped by Tracy."

Hart shook his head disapprovingly. "That wasn't good business, Yarrow. How many times must I remind you that we don't give advice until we've got our retainer, and that we mustn't let our personal feelings affect our professional judgment?"

"That's all right for you," growled Yarrow sulkily. "You're just an adding-machine—you ain't got any bowels. I can't stand by and see a man sticking his head into the noose without warning him that hanging hurts."

"You'd better apply for a job on the force, Yarrow. That's the way the police usually blunder."

"I think I could show them a thing or two about their business," retorted Yarrow. "I went all over Barlow's house, from cellar to garret, while they was a dozen flatfeet in the place; and they never knew I was there till I was ready to quit."

"You didn't get much by it," sneered Hart.

"Didn't get much!" echoed Yarrow, bristling up. "No, I didn't! Only doped out the weapon—but o' course that ain't much, though it's got the cops up in the air yet."

"I could have 'doped' that from the report of the inquest, without leaving the office," said Hart. "So Adams convinced you of his innocence because he practically pleaded guilty?"

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"That's about it, I guess."

"Suppose he was purposely laying a false trail—keeping the police interested in things that he could easily explain if he wanted to, and so leading them off of things that he knew he couldn't explain? Or didn't that occur to you?"

"No, it didn't. It's too crazy."

"Or too subtle," added Hart, with a smile that he knew to be irritating.

"Look here!" cried Yarrow, taking his pipe from his mouth lest he should choke over it. "Do *you* think Adams did it?"

"No, I never did."

"Then why the devil do you keep pestering me about it?"

"It amuses me to watch you floundering around where you've no business to be," was the airy explanation. "That's my part of the business, Yarrow, and the less you addle your poor brain over it, the keener you'll be when I throw you on the scent."

"You throw me! You——"

"That's the terms of our partnership, remember. Any time you think you can make more money by your lone, or on the force——"

"I'm senior partner!" bellowed Yarrow.

"And I'm manager," retorted Hart.

That question of seniority had been bitterly contested; and Hart had finally yielded the palm only because he secretly cherished the idea that it was somehow bigger to sit in the background and direct affairs than to make a parade of his superiority.

"Oh, nix on the argument," begged Yarrow wearily, falling into the vernacular because it jarred on his partner. "Let's get down to cases."

"Meaning you would go right out and arrest Decker, I suppose?" sneered Hart.

"In a minute!" cried Yarrow. "If he ain't guilty, who is?"

"I don't know."

"You're doing a lot of talking about something you don't know nothing about," retorted Yarrow, sneering in turn.

"I'm waiting to hear you make out your case," he was reminded. "What are you going to do about Decker's alibi?"

"Forget it. It was nothing but a lot of lies. Miss Decker was lying. Why wouldn't she, when she thought her crazy dad was in for the long trip? And Slocum was lying, too," insisted Yarrow.

"Why should he lie?" asked Hart.

"To hold his job. If Decker broke away and did the job, who'd really be to blame but Slocum, the nurse that was hired to look after him?"

"Not good enough, Yarrow. If Slocum knew for sure that Decker did it, he'd be too scared to keep quiet. He's not much of a man, that Slocum."

"You think Decker's alibi would hold, then, if he was tried for the job?"

"I hope so, for I'm sure he didn't do it."

"Who did, then?"

"I don't know, I tell you."

"Why don't you know? Ain't it your business to know such things? Do you want me to addle my brains trying to do my work and yours, too?" demanded Yarrow, chuckling, in spite of his pretended rage, at the neat way in which he was turning the tables.

"You do your work without so much talking, and I'll be able to do mine," retorted his partner. "What have you found out about the quarrel between Adams and Miss Decker?"

"No more'n I've told you. They's money mixed up in it somewhere, or I'm a wop."

"There's money in the whole job—lots of money. And there's money in it for us, if we can get the job."

"We got a fat chance, with that josher Welding hanging round Miss Decker," growled Yarrow.

Hart smiled reminiscently at the reference to the part Welding had played in his own unsuccessful attempt to interest Miss Decker.

"We'll worry about Welding when the time comes. Did you find out why Miss Decker went to see Adams yesterday?"

"Not a thing. They ain't friendly at the jail, and you said not to flash any money yet."

"Not yet."

"Whatever it was, she came away all broke up," said Yarrow. "Maybe Bertram sent her."

"Of course he did—Bertram's scared half out of his skin."

"So's everybody else connected with the case except Adams."

"Yes, except Adams, who's in jail awaiting trial for murder. Isn't that all the proof you want that he's innocent?"

"I know he is, I keep telling you!"

"Then let's see who is guilty."

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"Yes," agreed Yarrow, with a derisive grin. "Let's!"

CHAPTER IX

"ON SPEC"

UNMOVED by his partner's derision, Hart leaned comfortably back and blew smoke through his nose.

"We can solve the Barlow murder," he declared judicially, "by answering four questions: when, how, why, and by whom it was committed."

"Perzackly!" jeered Yarrow. "Just like that—nothing to it!"

"And," continued Hart imperturbably "the solution of the first three questions will naturally answer the fourth."

"Ain't you the child wonder, though!" cried Yarrow in mock admiration.

"Very well, then. We know that Barlow was murdered between eleven and twelve on the night of the twenty-third of June of this year."

"Sure it was this year?" murmured Yarrow, jeering from force of habit.

"How Barlow was killed, we also know," continued the analyst.

"Also from the findings of the coroner's jury," chuckled Yarrow, with an amicable if ironic wink that Hart returned.

"From the findings of a man who is considerably cleverer than all the coroner's juries that were ever drawn," corrected Hart, thus making amends for his previous belittling of his partner's efforts.

"I guess yes!" crowed Yarrow. "And the police, too, while you're talking. Didn't I pick it up right under their noses?"

"You did—and a good job it was," Hart complimented him. "And I think we can safely assume that the police will be content to continue their search for the heavy broken cane that did the deed."

"That's one thing they are doing," grinned Yarrow. "Tracy's got all the kids on the South Side busy, going over those prairie lots along Lake Street with a magnifying glass. And they're running him bow-legged with false clews."

Hart echoed his partner's derisive laughter, then asked—

"We're satisfied, then, that eleven-thirty is near enough to the time?"

"With what we know, and what the doc said, I should say we was. That stuff about *rigor mortis* is true. I've seen it proved often."

"Then we come to the third question: What was the motive?"

"Money."

"That's what we both think, but you must remember that the money motive don't necessarily mean that money was the primary motive."

"You're getting too deep for me," growled Yarrow.

"So I supposed," was the serene answer. "What I mean is this: The money for which the murder was committed might have been the cause of a quarrel years ago; or it might have been money that was due and unpaid—some of Barlow's grinding of the poor that Ben mentioned. Or it might be that Barlow had cheated somebody, or was trying to. Or——"

"Or bosh!" ejaculated the exasperated Yarrow.

"Then we agree with the police that the motive was not robbery, for Barlow was known to keep no money in the house; and Barlow's precautions showed he feared murder, not robbery. Otherwise he'd have bought a new safe. Therefore the motive was revenge for some injury, which, as we have decided, had something to do with money. So we have already narrowed the search down to a man who had a grudge against Barlow and who was familiar with his house and his habits."

"Good enough!" growled Yarrow.

"We know that Adams might have had a motive, but we've already settled with Adams—let's leave him out," continued Hart. "We'd naturally suspect Decker next, but he apparently didn't have the chance; and until we have something to upset his alibi, we shall have to accept it. You're agreed?"

"I ain't got any proof to the contrary," was Yarrow's grudging reply.

"There remain Ben and Slocum. I'm surprised the police didn't pick Ben for the victim. He had a million chances where another man would have one."

"Ben's all to the good," growled Yarrow. "Lay off him."

"How about Slocum?"

"Nothing doing," grunted Yarrow. "He'd do a lot for money, if I make him right; but not murder."

"No chance of Decker's bribing him to do it?"

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Yarrow pondered a moment over the question, as if it surprised him.

"No," he said slowly, "I can't see it. From his carryings on, I'd say Decker'd done the job himself, if he'd wanted it done."

"Agreed," concluded Hart. "Then we have the nice job of hunting for a man whom we couldn't identify if he should walk into this office."

"It's beginning to sound good," chuckled Yarrow, rubbing his hands together in anticipation of a chase that would exert all his skill. "Only it seems to me like you'd talked yourself back into the hole you came out of."

"I have," agreed Hart. "That's our problem—to answer the questions 'when, how, why' so that all three answers point unmistakably to one person, and to him alone. Then we'll have the answer to our fourth question and know who killed Henry Barlow."

"Got any idea who he might be?"

"Not the slightest."

"It might 'a' been some relation Barlow's done dirt."

"That's possible, of course; but so far as we know, Barlow and Adams are all that's left of the family."

"Might get a job hunting up lost relatives," suggested Yarrow hopefully.

Hart shook his head disgustedly. "Don't you suppose I thought of that? Bertram turned me down cold. He'll advertise, of course, but he won't spend a dollar looking up any missing Barlows or Adamses."

"Then where the devil do we come in?" groaned Yarrow.

Hart drew several long deep whiffs from his cigaret before he found nerve to answer.

"We're going ahead on our lone, on the chance that we run down something that will look good to Adams or Miss Decker."

"Take a case on spec?" howled Yarrow. "Not on your life!"

"It won't cost so much."

"It won't cost me nothing—not a dollar nor a day's work!" vowed Yarrow. "Trailing for fun's all good enough to keep my hand in and my nose sharp; but when them that's got money won't come across, they can hang who they please for all of me."

"I'm willing to chance my own time and expenses."

"Time's all you do spend," growled Yarrow, "setting round in a fine office all day, wearing out your pants and smoking them —— dope pills. I got to get out and hustle, and hustle hard. No siree, Hart! Taking a case on spec ain't in our agreement, and you can leave me out."

Hart added his cigaret stub to an overflowing ash tray, walked out into the waiting-room, and faced his partner with all the presence that he could muster.

"Listen to me, Jeff," he pleaded; and when Hart used given names he was in deadly earnest. "We've had one or two nice little jobs in the three years we've been working together, and we've done fairly well; but we haven't got any reputation.

"The only way we we'll ever get one is to take a case the police have laid down on, and show them we know a thing or two more than they do. Right now they class us as amateurs and give us the laugh, and so does everybody else; but once we win a big case right under their noses, we'll be able to get information out of them when we want it, and we'll have this waiting-room so jammed we'll have to hire a boy to keep track of our cases.

"This Barlow murder case is the biggest chance we'll ever have, and we're a pair of fools if we don't grab it and get busy."

"Mebbe you're right," admitted Yarrow, who was rather dazed by his partner's mastery of the situation. "But what if we lose?"

"Nobody will know we've been on the case," answered Hart. "We'll have to work absolutely under cover, remember."

"That's the devil of it!" growled his partner. "It ain't no cinch clawing after clews on the Q. T. It's all right for you——"

"I'm writing now to Hope, Arizona," was the silencing retort.

"Why don't you try Halifax?" sneered Yarrow.

"Because both Barlow and Decker came to Chicago from Arizona," retorted Hart.

"How did you find that out?"

"I just happened to mention the Barlow case at the club yesterday, when I was lunching with the cashier of the Tenth National, and we got talking." The air with which Hart mentioned his club connections and acquaintances made Yarrow writhe silently. "The cashier remembered that Barlow and Decker came from Hope about twenty years ago, with a big sum in

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gold between them. That was all he did know, though."

"You got as much as I did," admitted Yarrow, "and got it easier."

"Why were you holding out on me?" demanded the analyst severely.

Yarrow grinned at him.

"Thought I might get a chance to run out to Arizona, at the firm's expense," he admitted.

"I hope that won't be necessary. I ought to be able to get hold of some old newspapers or records, especially if there was anything shady about their past."

"Here's hoping!" sighed Yarrow, with a grin that made his words anything but ambiguous.

"In the meantime, there are several things I wish you'd look into."

"Shoot!" was the resigned answer.

"First of all, I want to know why Decker is so crazy against cuckoo-clocks."

"Nobody knows but him and Barlow, and Barlow's dead and buried."

"Ask Decker, then."

"Hey?"

"Can you do any better?"

"Ain't that the limit?" For want of a more sympathetic listener, Yarrow addressed the query to his blackened pipe. "A crazy man setting me to pump a crazy man!"

"Maybe you can learn something from Slocum."

"It'll be like taking milk from a cow," yawned Yarrow.

"Then perhaps you can get him to tell you why Decker was so uneasy the night of the murder."

"Slocum testified he was same as usual."

"I know, but it won't do any harm to ask."

"A'right!" grunted Yarrow.

"Get all you can about the real relations of Barlow and Decker, and particularly anything about their early life in the West. Then find out the real reason for the quarrel between Adams and Miss Decker; I have a feeling it bears on the murder somehow. I know you always keep your eyes and ears open, but I want to remind you that this is the blindest trail you ever followed, and you can't afford to neglect any detail."

"For them kind words, thanks!" snarled Yarrow. "Do you know you're laying out work enough for ten men?"

"Where'll we get the other nine?" retorted Hart. "I'm not asking miracles—just telling you all the things we've got to investigate. You can't tell now which one may be important. We're looking for straws. And I'm convinced that the real clew is here in Chicago, walking around right under our noses, in the person of the unknown murderer."

"A'right," yawned Yarrow, rising and pocketing his pipe and his black gloves together. "I'll ask every guy in Chicago if he croaked Hank Barlow."

CHAPTER X

JUST A FRIEND

ON A hot, still afternoon, some five days after the tragedy at the Cuckoo's Nest, Franklin Welding stepped out of the Barlow half of the house and rang the Decker bell. Welding wore an air of repressed elation; and while he waited he swung his light stick in time to a gay air which he whistled softly through his teeth.

His exhilaration was not lost upon the maid Hilda, and she smiled up at him as she greeted him.

"Mr. Decker's sleeping, sir, but Miss Ann's in the arbor."

Still swinging his cane to the soft whistle, Welding strolled happily round the house and on to the unbroken greensward. Well he knew where to find Ann, for he had passed several hours there with her in the last few days. As he sighted her white dress shining through the shrubbery, he quickened his steps and let his whistle become sufficiently audible to herald his coming.

Ann looked around with a slight start and quickly passed her handkerchief across her eyes. If she had been indulging in the unusual luxury of a quiet cry, she appeared to be glad of the interruption, for she welcomed him with a smile and motioned him to a seat on the bench beside her.

"Thanks," said Welding, pretending not to observe the traces of recent tears. "But I prefer the cool grass, if you don't mind. I can see you better, too," he added audaciously.

"At a distance?" she laughed, though a faint color showed in her cheeks. "Do take off your coat and be as comfortable as you can."

"This is the coolest spot I've found today," approved Welding, as he lay back with a contented sigh and stared idly at

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the mass of vine-hung branches overhead.

It was indeed a cool and restful nook to find in a city panting under an August-like heat. The embowering trees were trimmed high to admit any breeze that might blow, while the vines that fringed their lower branches formed an impenetrable screen against the sun. The grass upon which Welding lay was smooth and thick, and fresh-scented from its morning clipping. A great rosebush added its perfume to the refreshing smell of growing things and helped to give the spot a restful sense of semi-privacy.

As she watched Welding, relaxed in unconscious grace at her feet, Ann's thoughts turned to that other man who so lately had shared the fragrant seclusion of her bower, and who now languished in a noisome cell. It came to her, with the shock of a blow, that her present companion was a usurper, and she fell to wondering what attributes they possessed in common, that had made it possible for her so soon to allow Welding to fill the place in her life that once had been Adams's.

Both had the lean but muscular build, the strong, clean-cut faces and firm mouths, the deferential gentleness masking hidden strength that belongs to the true American type; but in these respects they were not different from scores of men whom she had seen. And on closer analysis, she realized that Welding and Adams had nothing more in common.

Welding was the older by perhaps ten years; naturally, therefore, his face was more lined, his opinions were more fixed; but there was a further and more subtle difference that she found it hard to define. There was about Welding an air of impatience with himself and circumstances, almost of recklessness and deliberate disregard for consequences, that might have been irresistibly alluring to some women; but in Ann, long trained by stern necessity to self-reliance, it roused a vague distrust, for which she had neither reason nor explanation. It was as if she secretly feared that he might break out in the most unexpected manner, like a slumbering volcano and that she would be helpless either to stay the outbreak or to escape it.

Yet she did like and trust him. Of course he could never really fill the place in her life that had been Adams's; but she was glad of his friendship, grateful for his kindly endeavors to share her worries. And so Ann dismissed the suspicion that had momentarily disturbed her.

"I stopped in at Barlow's for a minute," remarked Welding presently. "I wanted to see how the place usually looked; I never was in there but once—at the inquest, you know."

"I hope Ben did the honors," smiled Ann.

"After his own fashion. I noticed the cuckoo-clock's still in place. Doesn't he ever start it up, just for spite?"

"We haven't heard a sound since the day of the funeral. Fred sent him word to stop it, so that settled the matter."

"Your father's asleep again, Hilda tells me."

"Yes. I think he's making up for the hours he's laid awake listening for that terrible clock to strike."

"That was a nasty thing for Barlow to do."

"But you don't know the worst of it. Mr. Barlow found out about father's lying awake listening, and he'd stop it once in a while, just to keep him on the rack."

"The devil!" cried Welding. "That's not a swear word, Ann, it's my frank opinion of the late Henry Barlow. I can't help it if the man is dead."

"It's what he was," answered Ann in a hard voice. She made no comment upon his addressing her by her given name, for latterly he had been falling into that habit, apparently without thinking.

"I'm afraid, though," she continued sadly, "that the relief has come too late. Father's failing every day. It sounds foolish, I know, but it seems to me he has the idea that he'll be next."

"Next?"

"The horrible victim of that horrible murderer," explained Ann with a repressed sob.

"My dear Ann! It's quite impossible."

"I hope and pray so! But you must remember that we haven't the slightest idea yet why Mr. Barlow was murdered, and if it was for some old grudge, it's quite possible that father's in just as great danger."

"That's all silly imagining!" protested Welding. "If there was such a chance—even a remote one—don't you suppose the police would see that your father was properly guarded? Forget it, Ann, please! It's all nonsense!"

"I'll try to," she promised meekly.

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"You ought to get away for a while."

"Impossible!"

"Nothing's impossible that has to be done," was the axiomatic retort. "I'll bring out some resort literature tonight, and we'll see if we can't find just the place for you."

She shook her head uncertainly, as if the idea appealed to her too much to be easily dismissed.

"You're very good, Mr. Welding, but father'd fret like a child if I was away."

"A little fretting won't hurt him. You can trust Slocum."

"No, I can't," she answered, with a little frown between her eyes. "Mr. Slocum has been drinking lately."

"You have more than your share of troubles, Ann." Welding leaned further forward so that he could place his hand upon hers, as it lay on the bench beside her. "I—I wish I could help you bear them."

"I miss Fred so," she murmured absently.

With a jerk, Welding withdrew the hand whose caressing touch she had appeared not to feel.

"I thought you were done with Fred?" he questioned almost roughly.

Ann started out of her dreaming.

"Have I said anything?" she gasped.

"You've been dreaming about Fred," he laughed mirthlessly. "So that's what you were crying about, off here all by yourself?"

She looked at him with a curious, sober intentness that made him fear that he had gone too far; and her words only partly reassured him.

"I suppose you can't understand," she said gently; "but I feel, somehow, that I'm to blame for his being in jail."

"That's nonsense!" he cried hotly. I can't make you out at all today, Ann."

"Fred's case comes up before the grand jury this afternoon," she sighed. "He's sure to be indicted."

"Cheer up!" answered Welding in a brave attempt to argue her out of her despondent mood. "We know he'll be acquitted."

"Do we?" Ann sighed, then murmured half reproachfully: "I'm beginning to wish we'd commissioned Mr. Hart to go ahead, in spite of Fred's objections."

"Really, Ann," protested Welding, with a vexed laugh, "I didn't suppose you'd be impressed with that grand manner of his."

"I wasn't—it annoyed me; but I do think he was sincere in believing Fred innocent."

"Well, I don't. He struck me as a four-flusher."

Ann got to her feet and walked up and down before the bench, with a puzzled frown between her eyes. Welding watched her keenly a moment before he continued—

"However, if you're going to worry so, I should advise hiring detectives for your own peace of mind."

"It would make me feel a good deal easier," she acknowledged. "I know you mean to advise me for the best, but I may send for Mr. Hart yet."

At this juncture Hilda made her appearance with tea and cooler beverages; and neither reverted to the question of what should be done for Adams.

ANN resumed her seat, and Welding was exerting himself to be entertaining, when the topic which he chiefly desired to avoid was brought to the fore again by the arrival of Attorney Bertram. The old lawyer looked pale and careworn; and when he swept off his Panama in a courtly bow and wiped his perspiring face his hands shook perceptibly.

At his coming, Ann's face went as white as his. She leaned to meet him, so that she had to grip the edge of the bench to keep from falling forward, and her big eyes pleaded mutely for some word of hope. When he began a querulous tirade against the weather, she interrupted with a husky—

"The grand jury?"

"They indicted him, my dear," answered Bertram chokily. "They couldn't do otherwise, under the circumstances."

Slowly Ann's fingers loosened their grip on the bench and fluttered to her throat as if to stay the wild throbbing that threatened to suffocate her.

"Indicted—for murder!" she whispered.

"There, there, child! Don't take it so hard!" begged the lawyer, laying his hand on her shaking shoulder. "The indictment's a mere legal formality."

"They're trying to railroad him!" she sobbed, unconsciously using the cant term for which she had no synonym.

Sadly shaking his head, the old lawyer lowered himself into a lawn chair and gratefully accepted the ice-filled glass prepared for him by Welding. When he had moistened his lips, he cleared his throat to speak;

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but a raucous voice, suddenly breaking the peace of the drowsing street, held all three speechless and breathless.

"Uxtry! Uxtry!" bellowed the discordant voice. "All about th' South Side murd'rer indicted! Uxtry!"

Other voices answered, hardly less discordant; screen doors slammed like irregular rifle-firing; eager feet scurried across cool piazza and blistering cement. Behind the newshawker swirled a wake of morbid excitement; its spray of broken comment spattered icily upon the three in the arbor.

"Thank God!" murmured Bertram. "I got here first with the news!"

"How did Adams take it?" asked Welding.

"As a matter of course—which was the best thing he could do. I offered bail in any amount, but it was refused as I expected. There's no further hope on that score. The thing for us to do is to pray for an early trial and a jury that can't be influenced by eloquent platitudes."

"If there's anything I can do," offered Welding "I hope you'll let me know."

"Thank you, I will. But he doesn't want company, and he's just as set as ever that nothing shall be done for him."

"It's not right!" exclaimed Ann.

"We've just been discussing that," added Welding. "Miss Decker has almost decided to put Yarrow & Hart on the job."

"I wouldn't!" advised Bertram quickly. "Hart came to me the other day, but I wasn't at all favorably impressed by his ability—or, in fact, by his sincerity. His terms were exorbitant, in view of the reputation of his firm and the vague promises that he made."

"There, Ann!" cried Welding. "Isn't that almost exactly what I said?"

"Yes," nodded Ann, "but there are other detectives."

"If you're determined to have some one, I should certainly advise you to employ a firm of some standing," said Bertram.

"And you don't think I'd be interfering?"

"No-o. In fact, I may as well tell you that I have secretly engaged Evans to conduct the case. Of course, he'll be sadly handicapped by Adams's attitude, but he hopes by postponements and delays to break down the boy's obstinacy. If I could only get some definite information about that confounded will——"

"Any answer yet to your ads?"

"No. Miss Ann, I was wondering if it would be possible for me to question your father a little?"

"About the will?" asked Ann, startled.

"Oh, no! About his personal and business relations with my late client. I should be very careful."

"Of course you can see him," assented Ann readily; "though I can't give you any hope."

"May I try now?"

"I'll see if he's awake."

"A sad case, Mr. Welding," observed the lawyer, as they watched Ann cross the lawn to the house; "a very sad case. Unfortunately, I can't help but feel that my late client was more or less responsible for his unhappy condition."

Welding nodded agreement as he asked—

"Do you really expect to have any luck?"

"No. I haven't his daughter's faith in his rationality. It's simply a forlorn hope."

"Don't you think he might possibly have stolen and hidden the will? Men in his condition sometimes have such jackdaw traits, I understand."

"He might," hesitated Bertram, pursing his lips. "There's Miss Ann beckoning. Do you mind if I ask you to entertain her while I talk with her father? I might want to ask about the will, after all."

CHAPTER XI

THE "CADGER"

PRAIRIEVIEW was in a "no license" district. In consequence, there was no saloon within two miles of the Cuckoo's Nest; nor was there "much of anything doing" in staid Prairieview to interest a man who, like Slocum, was at leisure only in the afternoon.

Thus it had become his habit to spend several afternoons a week in the livelier wet district that adjoined Prairieview on the north. Often he never entered a saloon, but spent his time at the movies; when he did push through the swinging doors, he seldom drank more than two glasses of beer. He was seeking human companionship rather than alcoholic exhilaration; and, as he was careful of his money, and too self-conscious to be a good mixer, he made no friends. Of late, however—since the tragedy at the Cuckoo's Nest, to be exact—Slocum had visited Jake's place every afternoon; and he did not confine his orders to beer.

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Being rebuffed in his awkward attempts to mingle with Jake's "regulars," Slocum fell back upon the unsatisfactory expedient of drifting up and down the long bar, trying to scrape acquaintance with the transient trade. In the unwritten creed of saloondom, such actions laid him open to the damning suspicion of "cadging" for drinks; and Jake had about made up his mind to ask Slocum to transfer his custom elsewhere, when chance came to the rescue of the lonesome nurse.

In this instance, Chance took the form of a broad-shouldered stranger who dropped casually into Jake's place one hot afternoon, flipped his nickel upon the bar, and voiced a brief preference for "dark." Jake, who happened to be serving at the time, caught a glimpse of two keen gray eyes, and gave the stranger closer attention than he usually paid to a casual patron. Then the eyes dropped thoughtfully to the bar, and Jake, turning to answer the call of a thirsty nickel, observed that the stranger was attracting the unwelcome attentions of Slocum. So Jake watched and waited.

Slocum approached his unconscious prey with the sidling, cringing air of the professional cadger; but the stranger, buried in thought and his glass of beer, was apparently unconscious. His first warning of danger came when another empty glass was set upon the bar in time with his, and a beery voice at his elbow sighed plaintively—

"Good stuff on a hot day, ain't it?"

The startled stranger whirled about with a sharp "Hey?" that brought Jake trotting to the rescue.

"None of that, now," the proprietor warned the cowering Slocum. "If a gent can't take a drink by himself——"

"I wasn't doing nothing," muttered Slocum.

"Was you aimin' to set 'em up?" sneered Jake.

"No-o," admitted Slocum, too bewildered to grasp at the straw with impunity.

Jake's heavy hand shot across the bar, caught the suspected cadger by the shoulder, and swung him about to face the exit.

"Git!" he ordered, with a shove that materially aided Slocum to obey the command. "An' don't lemme ketch you in here again."

Unresisting, not even resentful, the dazed Slocum continued his progress toward the swinging doors. Then Chance sprang after him, caught him by the same handy shoulder that Jake had used, and haled him back to the bar.

"What's the row?" demanded the stranger.

"You got ears, ain't you?" growled Jake.

"Got a tin ear," explained the stranger. "What you got against him, anyhow?"

"He's bummin' drinks," muttered Jake.

"Bummin' nothin'!" retorted the stranger. "Why, this lad's got oodles o' dough! Ain't you?"

"Sure I have!" agreed the nurse; and in proof he pulled from his trousers' pocket a wad of bills thick enough to move Jake to remorse.

"My mistake, gents! My mistake!" apologized the proprietor, hastily filling three glasses. "Have one on the house, gents, jest to show they's no hard feelings."

"Had enough," muttered Slocum, standing upon his recovered dignity.

"Oh, be a sport!" urged the stranger, bending upon him a glance almost hypnotic in its friendliness. "Jake didn't mean nothing."

"Sure, not!" assented Jake eagerly. "This gent's been actin' so queer these few days——"

"It's the heat," explained the stranger.

Slocum nodded, gulped down his beer thirstily, and added—

"I get so —— lonesome."

"Me too," was the sympathetic answer. "Folks ain't anxious to chew the rag with a guy with a tin ear. Too many encores."

"I wouldn't mind," said Slocum almost wistfully.

"That's the boy! Drop in here often?"

"I have been—" Slocum hesitated and glanced at the listening proprietor with a questioning grin.

"Aw, can that 'has been' stuff!" growled Jake, grinning back. "You're welcome as a bock-beer sign."

"That's the boy!" reiterated the stranger. "Now we're all friends again. Name's Yarrow. How about you?"

Slocum introduced himself, and they shook hands all around to cement the happy acquaintance; and both patrons agreed to meet on the following day, under the kindly ministries of Jake.

Thus it was that Chance combined two kindly deeds at one lucky stroke, providing

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Slocum with a companion for his lonely hours, and finding Yarrow a talker ready to overlook the disadvantages of addressing a "tin ear." That is, both Slocum and Jake credited it to Chance, for both had already forgotten the uncommon eyes that shone from the commonplace face of the stranger.

IN THE days that followed, the odd pair had many a long talk in the comparative coolness of Jake's place. The result was that in three days Yarrow knew Slocum more thoroughly and more truly than that young man knew himself. This in itself was no small achievement, for Slocum was no blabber, even when drink unlatched his tongue.

It appeared that the nurse was of a type all too familiar—a young man who lacked ambition because he lacked an incentive. He was well content to remain with the Deckers, especially now that he had found a friend with whom to spend his leisure; yet he was haunted by a fear that he was about to be "let out" because something had suddenly driven him into steady drinking. But what that something was he could not say, nor could Yarrow guess. To the investigator, the nurse appeared to be pulled between two evils—the fear of losing his place if he did not stop drinking, and the fear of losing his self-control if he did not constantly nerve himself with alcohol.

Slocum would talk at length of his experiences in the State Asylum; but it was only after Yarrow had invented for himself a feeble-minded brother, and had asked Slocum's advice regarding his treatment, that the nurse would talk of Decker. Even then, he gave Yarrow no helpful information. Decker was undoubtedly crazy, said Slocum; but ordinarily he was no more dangerous than a mischievous and utterly irresponsible child. There were times when the unhappy man appeared almost normal; but there were certain topics —such as his past, and his relations with Barlow—which he would neither discuss nor permit to be discussed in his presence.

In order to obtain even this unsatisfactory information, Yarrow was finally obliged to explain that he was commissioned to hunt down Barlow's murderer, who might be equally dangerous to Decker. But though he showed himself ingenuously flattered by being asked to help Yarrow, whom he chose to consider a great detective, Slocum refused to say a word until assured that the investigator had no intention of bringing trouble upon the Deckers. Altogether, in spite of his many weaknesses and his utter lack of what Yarrow termed "guts," the investigator conceived a hearty respect and liking for the young man whom he was so cold-bloodedly pumping.

"It's like this," Slocum explained apologetically, when Yarrow felt that he might safely ask direct questions: "I'm a member of the family, you might say; and a man's rotten if he don't think first of his own folks. They've treated me white, and I ain't going to make any trouble for them."

"Nobody's asking you to," asserted Yarrow. "You don't know nothing, then, about what the trouble was between Decker and Barlow?"

"Not a thing. They scrapped about money most o' the time; but I never could make head nor tail of it."

"Did you ever think Decker done for the old man?"

Slocum hesitated, then shook his head decidedly.

"No, he never had the chance."

"You sure he didn't sneak past you, the time the cop saw you smoking on the piazza?"

"You was at the inquest," was the sullen answer. "I've answered that, under oath, too."

"What makes Decker so scared of cuckoo-clocks?"

"Search me! But I'm telling you, Mr. Yarrow, I'd hate to feel about anything like he feels about that clock."

"Ever try to smash it?"

"No. Funny thing, too, when you come to think of it. It seemed like he thought nobody but Mr. Barlow could stop it."

"Well," sighed Yarrow, "I guess I got to tackle Decker myself."

"You can't do that!" objected the nurse quickly.

"Hey?"

"Miss Ann would fire me without a reference."

"All you got to do is say Decker's lying, if he squeals. She'd take your word against a crazy man's, wouldn't she?"

"Ye—es."

"Well, then, what's the harm?"

"It won't do you no good," protested the

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uneasy nurse. "Mr. Bertram tried it the other day, and went off sore."

"What does he know about such things?" asked Yarrow contemptuously. "He's only a lawyer."

"I guess you'd find it a job getting sense out of a crazy man."

"Where's the harm trying, then? I ain't going to offer you money, Slocum, because you're a friend o' mine and wouldn't like it; but you'll be doing me a favor I won't forget if you'll give me half an hour with the old man."

"You're sure it won't make trouble?"

"Give you my word."

"Well, seeing you're a friend, s'pose you come around tomorrow about four. It's Hilda's afternoon off, and Miss Ann's going riding with Mr. Welding, so I promised to be back early."

"Going riding with Mr. Welding, is she? Just where does he come in?"

"I don't know. He's been hanging round a lot lately."

"Think he's trying to step into Adams's shoes?"

"Hilda does."

"Humph!" remarked Yarrow. "Four, you said?"

"Yes—if you got to do it."

"Four it is, then. And listen, Slocum, you don't know me from a book-agent. That'll let you out."

CHAPTER XII

DEBIT AND CREDIT

SHORTLY after four o'clock, Ann and Welding drove away from the Cuckoo's Nest in a smart gray roadster.

Standing at the end of the big porch, Decker watched them out of sight, waving his hand like an automaton in response to Ann's fluttering handkerchief. When they had disappeared from view, he still stood there, gazing stupidly after them; and he gave no sign of interest when a man mounted the front steps.

Slocum, sitting by the door, rose nervously to greet the newcomer, and quickly drew him into the seclusion of the porch.

"Keep out of sight as much as you can," he begged. "I don't want Ben to see you here."

"All right," nodded the other, with a slight smile. "How's his nibs?" indicating Decker with his thumb.

"He's had one of his dumb fits on all day. I'm afraid you won't get much." And after a dubious glance about him Slocum led the way toward the end of the porch. "Gentleman to see you, Mr. Decker," he announced quietly.

Decker slowly turned a vacant face to his visitor, offered his hand uncertainly, and stood waiting; while Slocum slipped back to his seat by the door.

At first glance Decker's ailment appeared to be physical rather than mental. He gave the impression of being the victim of a wasting disease, which had flayed the flesh from his big-boned frame and left him a wreck of failing manhood. The hand that he offered in greeting was dry and fleshless, and afflicted with a nervous trembling. His lips and ears were bloodless, his shaven cheeks were sunken and yellow, and his deep-set eyes were thatched with gray and underscored with black crescents.

It was the eyes that betrayed his real condition. They showed only a glimpse of the whites at the corners, and that was muddy from ill health and shot with blood. There was no distinction between pupil and iris; they merged into great dark brown circles, flat and expressionless, which seemed to mirror what they saw on their surfaces, rather than upon the retina They possessed, too, a fixity of gaze, direct and unwinking, that first attracted the attention of the observer by its strangeness, then repulsed by its haunting malignity.

They were fixed upon the caller now with a burning intensity more disturbing than open hate; but the caller faced them level-eyed, calm and smiling, yet with an air of delicate deference.

"Name's Yarrow, Mr. Decker," he explained, "special inspector from the health office." He permitted a momentary glimpse of his badge in proof. "Mind if we sit down?"

Decker vouchsafed a slight nod of assent and seated himself with such care that he appeared to expect to hear his dry joints crack if he bent them too quickly. The investigator so placed himself that he could look directly into the soulless eyes and watch each movement of the emaciated frame.

"It's rather peculiar, this job of mine," he continued, speaking slowly in his endeavor to maintain a correctness of speech

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unusual to him. "You see, the doctors are beginning to realize that noise affects the public health as much as dirt and smoke and bad air; and there's lots of invalids in Chicago today who would be strong and happy if they could get away from the racket."

Did a glint of interest show in the dull eyes? Yarrow thought so and rambled on contentedly.

"It don't trouble me much—I'm a bit deaf in one ear." He smiled deprecatingly at seeming to parade his affliction before a stranger. "But I guess I'm like most other folks, at that. It ain't the racket of the 'Loop' that bothers me; but when the noise follows you home, like a yowling cat, and camps out on your front doorstep all night, it's time to do something."

The speaker paused, but showed no discouragement when he failed to receive either word or sign from his auditor.

"So the chief is sending some of us inspectors out through the residence districts to make a quiet canvass and find out if there's any of these nuisances that can be suppressed under the discretionary power given the police."

Still no sign from the intent listener.

"Anything you say to me is confidential, understand," hinted Yarrow, "and we won't use your name. All you got to do is to prove to me you're being annoyed by some noise in the neighborhood. The police will do the rest."

The human automaton turned its dull eyes toward the Barlow side of the Cuckoo's Nest, cocked its gray poll in a listening attitude, and so continued, wide-eyed and voiceless, like an attentive parrot waiting to catch some word to which it could respond.

"It's a queer list I've got." Yarrow produced a neat note-book, and thumbed its leaves as he talked.

"Gentleman in the next block couldn't stand the children roller-skating on the cement sidewalk—said it got so he imagined they were doing the fox trot on his brain pan, whatever that is. Couldn't do anything for him though; the kiddies got their rights.

"Here's an old lady down the street a ways. She kicked on the man next door playing the trombone all night; but the trombone man comes back at the old lady for keeping a cat that runs a singing school in the court under his window."

Yarrow hitched his chair closer and leaned forward with a friendly twinkle in his eye.

"Here's one will make you laugh: Gentleman swears he'll have the law on his neighbor, because he keeps a cuckoo-clock."

"Gosh!" whispered Decker very softly, but very distinctly.

Yarrow settled back in his chair and let his jaw drop.

"Your case, too?" he demanded.

Unanswering, apparently unhearing, Decker lifted a trembling fist to shake it at the Barlow side.

"—— the tattling bird!" he whispered, and lapsed into a fit of incoherent cursing that tortured his mouth into horrid shapes. Then, in what might be described as a muted shriek: "Day and night—sleeping and waking—God! Will it never stop?"

"There, there, Mr. Decker," protested Yarrow soothingly. "We'll fix it! Just tell me all about it."

The deepset eyes, so dull before, turned upon the investigator a look that seared.

"That's a lie!" snarled Decker. "You can't stop it! It's got to go on."

"You leave all that to me," was the confident interruption. "Where's this cuckoo that's worrying you?"

"Listen!"

Eyes fixed once more on the Barlow house, breath coming from his dry throat with a rasp, Decker sat tense and rapt as a listening statue. Yarrow, too, strained his ears, wondering if indeed Ben had started the clock going again; but he heard nothing that remotely resembled the ticking of a clock. He shook his head and opened his mouth to speak.

"Sh-h!" whispered Decker, and began to beat time with a bony forefinger, as if counting the measured strokes of a gong.

"Eleven!" he muttered. "Always eleven!"

And Yarrow, sitting facing the white glare of a Summer afternoon and hearing the ordinary sounds of every-day life, shivered and glanced over his shoulder, so real had the haunted man made his phantasm appear.

"You heard it?" demanded Decker, quickly recovering from his momentary collapse.

Yarrow shook his head with a deprecating smile.

"Too faint for my bad ear," he suggested.

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"It rings like a thunderclap!" asserted Decker. "Day and night!"

"Where? In the other side of the house?"

"Everywhere! Everywhere I go! Cuckoo-clocks, —— cuckoo-clocks, striking eleven!"

The speaker ended with a dry sob and cowered in his chair, hiding his face in his shaking hands. Yarrow leaned toward him, laid a firm hand on his trembling knee, and spoke with kindly forcefulness.

"Look at me, Mr. Decker. Put your hands down and look at me. There! Straight in the eye. I'll see the clock don't annoy you any more. Straight in the eye—so-o!"

The two unusual pairs of eyes were giving glance for glance now—Decker's dull, yet pleading; Yarrow's compelling, but compassionate. And Yarrow held the other with glance and grip, while his voice cooed with maternal tenderness.

"I know just how you feel, Mr. Decker, and we'll stop all the clocks in Chicago if it'll help you any."

"There!" whispered Decker, trying to assume the listening attitude.

"Easy! Easy!" cooed Yarrow, gently pressing him back. "Keep quiet, now, and tell me all about it. What does the clock tell you when it strikes eleven?"

Decker shrank back trembling anew, and his pale face seemed to grow ghastlier; but Yarrow continued remorselessly, with his eyes probing into the soulless orbs of the other.

"Something about the past, ain't it? Perhaps some years ago? Something that made you——"

With an animal cry of pain, Decker wrenched his glance from the compelling eyes and gnawed his bony fingers in a frenzy, then suddenly flung his hands out clutching, clawlike, as he had done in Barlow's death chamber.

"I'll never tell!" he shrieked again in that muted voice. "I'll never tell!"

"Then I'll ask the cuckoo-clock," said Yarrow coldly, and made as if to rise.

The wildly waving hands clutched at his shoulders with bony fingers that bit like talons, and the dull eyes blazed wrath and dismay.

"No! No!" wailed the unhappy man, wrestling convulsively.

"That's better," soothed the investigator, gently disengaging the biting talons and holding the dry hands in his firm grip. "Clocks are such liars—but we'll soon shut them up."

"They've been lying ever since, night and day."

Realizing that Decker was growing less controllable each minute, Yarrow risked everything on one question.

"What do they talk about?" he whispered tensely. "Blood—blood on your hands?"

The gaunt figure grew suddenly rigid; the limp hands slid from Yarrow's grasp as though further shrunken, and the dull eyes flared with malignant terror.

"Blood!" muttered Decker, washing his hands in some invisible fluid, wringing them dry till the bones cracked, and watching the performance with a detached gaze that made Yarrow shiver again. "Blood! His blood everywhere. No!" he gasped, fighting for breath. "It's a lie! The clock lies!"

"You got to cut this," said a soft but inexorable voice at Yarrow's elbow, and the investigator turned to find Slocum at his side, white and nervous.

"Just a minute more," pleaded Yarrow.

"Well—all right," was the irresolute answer. "You'll have him going off the handle, first you know, and then I'll catch trouble."

Impatiently the investigator waved the nurse out of the way and bent again to his task.

"Whose blood?" he coaxed. "Whose blood—Barlow's?"

The other gazed at him wonderingly, then began to laugh in malicious derision.

"Barlow? Barlow's dead, you fool!"

"Who killed him?"

Again Decker stared, and then shook his head.

"There were so many people I couldn't see."

"You're sure he's dead?"

"There was a big funeral—right next door it was. Lots of people and flowers. People crying, the fools! I didn't cry."

"What did you do?"

"Laughed, like this.

The fiendish muted laughter chilled Yarrow's blood; while the assurance that this madman could answer sanely when he would, set his scheming brain on fire.

"Who killed Barlow?" he persisted.

"The cuckoo-clock!" jeered Decker, and continued his laughter.

Baffled, beaten, thoroughly exasperated

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with himself and his intended victim, Yarrow sat back in his chair and reached into his hip pocket for his handkerchief. The movement pushed aside his light coat and showed his nickel detective badge, shining brightly on his suspender strap.

Decker came out of his paroxysm of devilish gaiety with a start, leaned forward to lay a bony finger on the shining badge, and spoke with greater sanity than he had before displayed.

"You're a detective," he accused.

"So they say," drawled the chagrined investigator.

"And you're asking me who killed Barlow!"

Yarrow leaned forward with returning hope.

"Yes, I'm asking you who killed Henry Barlow?"

"There were too many people around for me to see," was the baffling answer.

The investigator leaned closer and shook an accusing finger in the listless yellow face.

"Peter Decker, you killed Henry Barlow!"

The accused man showed neither fright nor indignation. He was not even interested.

"Well, it's done," he said quietly, almost happily. "and a —— good thing. I'm sorry I didn't think of it before."

WHEN Hart learned the result of Yarrow's interview with Decker, he laughed so gleefully that the smoke of his monogrammed cigaret nearly strangled him.

"I hope you croak!" prayed Yarrow. "If you'd seen him trying to rub the blood off his paws!"

"Regular Lord Macbeth act, wasn't it?" chuckled Hart. "I'm not sure Decker wasn't playing you for a sucker."

"He's got bats all right," insisted the investigator, "and bloody ones, too."

"The poor fellow was sunstruck years ago," retorted Hart, "and he's never got over it. I just got some reports from Hope," he added, indicating a litter of papers on his desk.

Yarrow surveyed the pile of papers dubiously, for he had no liking for hunting facts in printed records.

"Give us the yarn," he begged.

Hart hesitated, glanced at his watch, and pulled out his cigaret case.

"All right," he assented, "I'm too late for dinner now."

This is the yarn as Hart told it to his partner:

Twenty years ago, Hope, Arizona, though primarily a cow town, was also a favorite outfitting point for prospectors, as well as the first stopping place on their return to civilization. At that period one of the big men of Hope was a certain Henry Barlow who, with his chum Peter Decker, had come West some years before to grow up with the country; but Fortune had consistently frowned at them.

Little was known of Barlow's antecedents; but he had shown himself a firm supporter of law and order, in spite of his intimate associations with the element that desired a free and easy, wide-open town; and it was significant of his general popularity that he was the unanimous choice for chief of Hope's newly organized police force.

Barlow's first official act was to appoint Peter Decker to the force; but Decker quickly proved himself incapable of performing police duty. He had experienced a severe sunstroke, and still suffered from occasional dizzy spells; and he could not long endure the heat of the Arizona sun. So Barlow compromised by grub-staking Decker and putting him to work developing a claim that they held in common in the vicinity of Hope; for underground Decker was as good as any man.

Almost coincident with the establishment of permanent law and order in Hope, there was a new rush to the adjoining goldfields that added much to the importance of Barlow's position; and his heady handling of several rather difficult situations increased his reputation as an efficient and honest chief. Altogether, he was regarded as a proud feather in Hope's metropolitan cap.

In the midst of these stirring times, Barlow himself, making his customary round of the town about midnight, stumbled upon the body of a man who had been murdered, apparently robbed, and secreted in a lonely spot on the edge of the straggling town. The coroner's inquest developed the fact that the murdered man was a stranger who had registered as Kellogg Campbell and given his residence as New York City. The coroner's jury returned an open verdict, the victim was decently buried at the expense of the town, and

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Barlow forwarded the facts to the New York authorities.

Two weeks later the stage brought to Hope a New York lawyer who declared that Campbell had carried on his person the sum of two hundred thousand dollars in gold and notes, and who set on foot belated measures tending to the discovery and punishment of the murderer. As the several men who had had a drink with the friendly stranger had already established indestructible alibis suspicion finally pointed an accusing finger at Chief Barlow, on the ground that the body had been warm and still bleeding from its brutal pounding when it was carried to the improvised morgue behind the doctor's office.

The New York attorney retained a local lawyer as associate counsel, imported a detective from Phœnix, and generally made things so unpleasant for Barlow that the chief was finally indicted at his own request, as the surest way to clear his name.

The resulting trial was a farce. Without leaving the jury box, the jury exonerated the defendant of all personal and official blame and strongly denounced the attempt of an outsider to defame one of Hope's first citizens. Indeed, the public indignation was so great that a tar-and-feather party was prevented only by Chief Barlow's announcement that he would jail every man who participated.

In spite of his vindication, Barlow appeared to feel that he was under suspicion and spent much time at the mine. Accordingly, when Decker struck a series of rich pockets one day, Barlow resigned as chief of police so as to devote all his time to assisting his partner in the clean-up. And when they finally departed for the East, leaving their gutted mine for sale, it was whispered that they carried about a million between them.

"WHERE'D you get that dope?" demanded Yarrow suspiciously, when Hart signified that he had reached the end of his tale.

Hart waved his hand at the litter of papers on his desk.

"Old newspapers, court records, affidavits of original settlers—all the usual sources."

"Sounds like it was swiped from the 'Boy's Own Library,'" commented the investigator.

"I've verified it at this end, too," added Hart, proud to exhibit his own skill in gathering facts. "I took the liberty of imposing on the good nature of my friend, the cashier of the Tenth National. I think I told you of lunching with him at the club?"

"A dozen times!" sneered Yarrow. "I know you belong to a shine club where bankers strain soup through their whiskers. Cook another pill, or pass the layout."

"All right!" laughed the clubman with superior scorn. "Apparently the lucky partners came straight to Chicago, banked their money, and settled down here in the Cuckoo's Nest to enjoy themselves. Their money was all in gold—coin or nuggets—and they gave out that they were successful miners. But a bank wouldn't be likely to inquire too deeply into the history of men who were ready to push so much gold across the counter."

"How much was it?" The question leaped from Yarrow's lips like a shot, and there was no sneer in his voice now.

"Don't you wish you knew?" mocked Hart. "That's my secret, for a while. But I will tell you this: an old miner looked over the Barlow-Decker property some years later. He swore that there had never been ten cents' worth of gold in the whole claim, and that any man who said he had taken gold out of that hole was either a liar or else a thief who had buried his loot there."

"Wow!" remarked Yarrow with a grin.

"The local lawyer who had been associated with Campbell's attorney raised a great hullabaloo when he heard the yarn and wanted to reopen the case. But Barlow had been tried and acquitted, and Hope was skeptical about old miners' yarns. So nothing was ever done."

"Why didn't they get after Decker?" demanded Yarrow. "If Barlow done it, his partner must 'a' been next, if he didn't have a hand in it himself."

"You still think Decker killed Barlow?"

"More'n ever. They was always scrapping about money—Campbell's money, it's a cinch. Sure Decker croaked Barlow!"

"Then he was mighty clever to hide it from you, this afternoon," remarked the analyst, with a delicate sneer.

"Hide nothing! You ain't forgot his bloody hands, hey?"

"'Who killed Cock Robin?'" mocked Hart.

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"Decker!" snarled Yarrow. "Decker—with his bloody hands!"

The analyst smothered the coal of his cigaret beneath his heel and reached for his coat.

"Let's go home," he yawned.

CHAPTER XIII

THE NIGHT WATCH

SLOCUM pushed through the swinging doors, answered Jake's hail with a gruff "Hullo!" and pulled the chair up to the table with a nervous jerk.

"How's th' boy?" Yarrow wanted to know.

"Rotten!"

The attentive Jake set before him his usual highball, but Slocum motioned it away with a shiver of disgust.

"A mug o' beer?" suggested Jake solicitously.

"Nothing doing!"

At a sign from Yarrow, the disappointed proprietor returned to the bar; but he left the highball on the table.

For the moment the investigator silently busied himself filling his noisome pipe, while he covertly watched his companion. It was evident to him that Slocum was going to pieces under the combined strain of his heavy drinking and his constant brooding. Now was the time to strike, and Yarrow ruthlessly put behind him his personal feelings and took up the task laid upon him by his profession.

"Ain't gone on the wagon, have you?" he demanded in an injured tone.

Slocum nodded shamefacedly and licked his puffed lips.

"Miss Ann jumped on me when I got back last night—said I got to stop boozing or hunt another place."

"That's easy."

"Don't you think it. It's a fat job, Decker's——"

"With a woman telling you where you get off at," was Yarrow's sneering comment. "Only trouble with a woman is, she forgets too easy."

"Huh?"

"Up all night, ain't you, and every night in the year, keeping cases on her batty father?"

"'Most every night."

"Don't have no trouble sleeping these hot days, I s'pose?"

"It's hell!" admitted Slocum, passing his hand across his bloodshot eyes.

"Always looking for trouble—it ain't like it was your trouble, neither—it's hers. And when you try to do a kind act by chewing the rag with your deaf pal, she lands on your neck for boozing."

"That's right," agreed Slocum, sliding his hand across the table toward the seductive glass.

"S'posing she does hand you your time—what then?"

Slocum hastily withdrew his hand and looked at the questioner with scared eyes.

"I'm done," he said in a flat voice. "I'd be touching you for the price of a meal in a month."

"Not you!" scoffed his friend. "Guess trained nurses like you don't grow on bushes in the parks, hey?"

"Maybe not," assented Slocum with modest pride in his known ability. "But she wouldn't give me a reference!"

"That's what I call ingratitood!" growled the investigator. "Here you been helping her out all these years—for nothing, you might say. Money can't pay for all you've done for her father."

"What you getting at?" demanded Slocum, with a startled glance over his shoulder.

Yarrow winked confidentially before he answered:

"You and me understand. No need putting it in words."

"I don't know what you're talking about," asserted Slocum, but his tone was too faltering to be convincing.

"All right," chuckled the other. "I got just one more thing to say: Any time you get down on your luck, you come straight to me. You know I'm your friend, don't you?"

"You make good use of your friends," accused Slocum.

"Sure I do!" grinned Yarrow. "What good's a friend if he can't help you out when you're in a hole? Decker ain't said nothing about my being there, has he?"

"No."

"Then where's the harm? You just gimme the chance and see how quick I'll do as much for you."

The disturbed young man looked long into the steady eyes regarding him across the table and somehow felt himself growing both cheerful and hopeful.

"I believe you would," he said at last.

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"Surest thing you know!" cried Yarrow, leaning over to clap him on the shoulder. "Now you got that off your chest, drink up and have another. Best medicine in the world for what ails you."

"Guess maybe you're right," acknowledged Slocum and set down his empty glass.

Jake appeared as promptly as if Yarrow had secretly summoned him; and his two friends labored industriously during the next half-hour to drown the nurse's sorrows. But, as the drink laid hold on Slocum's brain, his troubles returned with a poignancy that loosened his tongue to unwonted garrulity and almost unmanned him to tears.

"It ain't that I mind losing the place," he explained. "It's the —— ingratitude of it."

"After all you've been doing for her father, too," agreed Yarrow, with a sympathetic shake of his head.

"It ain't every man would take the chances I did."

"You said it!"

"If I was to tell all I know——"

"Don't you never do it!" interrupted Yarrow nervously. "It ain't safe. You don't know who you can trust."

"I guess a man's handled bugs as long as I have knows something about human nature," retorted Slocum, evidently offended at the slight cast upon his perspicacity. "Just to prove it, I got a good mind to tell you all about it."

"No you don't!" cried Yarrow in alarm. "I ain't aiming to get mixed up in no perjury case."

"Perjury!" whispered Slocum, with a ghastly pallor coming over his flushed face.

"What else? You lied to the coroner, didn't you?"

Slocum nodded and wet his fevered lips with his tongue.

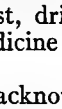
"Keep it under your hat, then. I was only guessing, mind. They can't prove nothing by me—if you keep your gab closed."

"But I want your advice," said the other hoarsely.

"You got it!" snapped Yarrow. "Shut your head."

"So that's what you call being a friend," blubbered the shaken young man. "You're an officer of the law—you'll know what to do. By——! You *got* to listen!"

"Oh, if you put it that way," was the ungracious answer, "I got nothing more to say. Shoot your wad."



"I WAS out on the porch smoking," began Slocum almost breathlessly.

"Back up!" commanded Yarrow with a sharpness that had the intended effect of steadying his companion. "If you got to tell me, begin at the beginning and don't hold nothing back. And don't you try lying to me, young man, for sure as you do I'll kiss you good-by."

"Sure I'll tell you everything—just as it happened," protested Slocum. "What'd I hold out on you for?"

"Search me! I was just warning you."

"You—you ain't going to use this against Mr. Decker?"

"You got to leave that to me. I ain't asking to hear, remember."

"I got to tell," sighed the nurse. "I can't stand it any longer."

"Spill it, then. We ain't got much time."

Slocum began with an attention to unimportant details that caused Yarrow to groan inwardly; but as he proceeded, the young man, helped by keen questions from the investigator, proved that for once he had been fairly observant. By the time he reached the nub of his narrative, Slocum was talking with a vividness and clearness that showed that he was reliving in imagination all that had happened.

"'Bout eleven o'clock Mr. Decker began to get restless, as he often did about that time of night. After I took him up to say good night to Miss Ann, he wandered round the house for a spell, then went out on the porch. I was right at his heels, understand, for we never let him out of sight when he's got those restless fits.

"He was moseying up and down the porch, mumbling something about the cuckoo-clock. I leaned against the porch rail, where I could keep an eye on him, and made me a cigaret. I noticed Mr. Barlow hadn't gone to bed yet—you could see the light round the curtains in the living-room; and it looked to me like his front door stood half open.

"Bimeby Mr. Decker noticed the open door and went to it and listened. After a while he went inside. I didn't think anything of that, because he had the run of Mr. Barlow's side like he did ours. Many's the night he's spent an hour or so there with

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the old man, and I'd have an easy watch of it.

"But this night I was hardly a minute before I saw him coming back. I hadn't half finished my smoke. He was going at a funny little dog trot he hits when he gets excited, and he was swinging his arms and talking to himself and cackling. I chucked my butt over the rail and went up to let him know I was there on the job. That's all you got to do usually to make him calm down. But he didn't seem to see me—bumped right into me before I saw he'd gone plumb off his nut.

"'It's gone!' says he, still talking to himself and not noticing me any more than I was one of the pillars of the porch. 'It's gone!' And he starts off on that crazy chuckle of his."

"What time was that?" interrupted Yarrow.

"Must have been about eleven-thirty. I don't know exactly."

"Go on."

"Orders was to keep Mr. Decker out of sight when he went bad that way," continued the nurse. "So I hustled him into the house. Soon as we got under the hall light I pulled him up short to look him over and see if he needed any dope, when all of a sudden he cut the chuckling and let a rattle out of his throat like he was dying. Then he began rubbing his hands together, over and over, like you see him do the day you was there—like he was washing his hands. He was, too. They was all over blood, and he was trying to rub it in. And he was beginning to chuckle again. Maybe I wasn't scared stiff!

"'Course, first thing I thought of was that he'd done for old Barlow. I wouldn't have blamed him a mite, neither, if he had. Then it struck me what a fix I was in, if he had done anything. Excuses don't go when you're handling bugs. Seemed like the best thing I could do was to keep my mouth shut and let on I didn't know anything about it. So I hustled him into the washroom and cleaned him all up good. So far's I could find, there wasn't a drop of blood anywhere excepting on his hands. He didn't even seem to miss that—let me do for him like a lamb; but after I'd scrubbed his hands 'most raw, and dusted 'em off with talcum powder, he still kept rubbing 'em round and round. I've seen things before that didn't set well on my stomach, but that was the limit!

"Then I took him back to the living-room and tried to find out what he'd been into. First, though, I locked the front door on him and went down on my hands and knees on the porch outside, to see if he'd dropped any blood. I didn't dare show a light, but I guess if there'd been a speck there I'd found it."

"You didn't go in next door to see what had happened to Barlow?" asked Yarrow.

"Not me! I did think of it, but I was scart I'd get mixed up in something. Besides, I thought I could get it out of Mr. Decker. When he's feeling right, he'll talk to me like a real person. But they was nothing doing that night. I gave him everything I'd learned at Kankakee—tricks I'd never tried on him before, and wouldn't want Miss Ann to know about. Nothing doing! I might as well tried the third degree on a Clark Street dummy. He just sat watching himself washing his hands, and chuckling. So bimeby I give him up, hunted myself up a big drink, and sat down by him to think it over.

"The more I figured on it, the surer I was Mr. Decker hadn't had time to do anything. I'd started my smoke before he went in, and I hadn't finished when he came trotting out. He went in empty-handed, too, and come out the same way, except for the blood. I hadn't heard a sound, neither, mind you, and I wasn't ten feet from Mr. Barlow's door all the time Mr. Decker was in there. If I'd heard a gun go off, or any racket at all, it would been different. But I didn't. And when I told the coroner I got good ears, I was only telling the truth. No, sir! There wasn't a chance in the world Mr. Decker had any hand in it.

"But that wouldn't let me out—nor him neither—if some foxy dick found out what I knew. It would go pretty hard with Mr. Decker if I said anything, for it's dead easy to cook up a case of murder against a poor nut that won't be believed on oath. So I just made up my mind then and there that I wouldn't say a thing more'n I wanted to—oath or no oath. I had an awful hunch something had been done by somebody, and I'd better have it all figured out in advance how I was going to act. Lucky I did, too.

"One thing worried me was that I'd seen Holdane across the street when I was rolling my smoke, and it looked like he couldn't miss seeing me when I lighted the match.

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I figured, though, that he wouldn't have seen Mr. Decker, on account of the vines hiding the porch. So I felt safe enough.

"Well, by the time I'd got my alibi fixed up tight, Mr. Decker began getting restless again. I never had such a night in my life. He kept wanting to get out and into Barlow's—what for I couldn't make out. And the way he kept washing his hands, I didn't like to think. 'Bout three he got so bad I shot him full o' dope and rolled him into bed. It's a good thing the doc was on a case that morning, for he'd known Mr. Decker'd been doped, and then it would been 'Good night, nurse!' for me. I gave him what I thought would keep him safe for twelve hours, at least; but he must have been worse than I thought, the way he ducked us while we was at breakfast.

"You can bet I didn't sleep, though. I camped out in the front hall all night, with the light turned out and the door on the crack; and I kept one ear cocked for a peep from Mr. Decker, and the other for some sound from Mr. Barlow. When it begun to get so light I was afraid of being found rubbering, I locked the door and went upstairs to Mr. Decker's room.

"Would you believe it? His hands was going in his sleep, and he had a grin on him like you'll see on an old tombstone. I don't mind saying I didn't care much about staying in his room; but it was on the front of the house, so I could see if anything happened; and of course nobody'd think it funny finding me there, up and dressed, any time o' day or night.

"I heard Mr. Barlow's cuckoo-clock strike six—you can't prove it by me whether it struck crazy or not. I had something else to think of. I knew he always got up first, and before I'd waited five minutes that morning, I'd given something pretty to hear him routing out Ben and the cook, on the other side of the wall. I would, for a fact! I was that worked up and scared. When half-past six come, and no Barlow, I knew there'd never be any Barlow any more and that I was going to have a chance to see if my alibi would hold water.

"Miss Ann come in some time after eight. I noticed she looked at me kind o' queer and sniffed a little; but I didn't let on I saw. I had taken a drink or two to keep me going—who wouldn't?—and I didn't care what she thought about it. She wasn't looking any too good herself. Her eyes was all red and swollen, and she didn't look like she'd slept a wink. I knew she had, though, for I'd listened at her door more'n once to make sure.

"'Course I didn't let on anything was wrong, and she went away to finish dressing. Then bimeby Hilda called us to breakfast. Usually breakfast's my best meal; but that morning I didn't want any. I just wanted to stay there and watch the front walk. I had to go, though; but I bet I knew when the first cop beat it up the front walk and into the Barlow side."

Slocum came to a full stop, poured and drank a stiff "jolt" of whisky, and leaned back with a sigh.

"That's all?" asked Yarrow.

"You know the rest. You said you was at the inquest."

"What about Miss Ann—you think she didn't know a thing till her father broke loose?"

"She might, but it ain't likely. She was shut in her room all night—asleep every time I listened."

"Or pretending to be," hinted Yarrow.

"No chance! Mr. Decker and I always wear felt slippers nights, so's not to disturb her."

"You don't think she could have croaked Barlow herself, then?"

Slocum showed a flash of rage, then began to laugh.

"I should say not!" he jeered. "A girl Miss Ann's size beat up Barlow like that? Not in a thousand years!"

"All right, don't get in a sweat. Just wanted to see how you felt about it."

"Well—now you know what's been eating me," sighed Slocum. "What'm I going to do about it?"

"Do? Nothing, you fool! Keep your head shut, like I told you in the first place."

"But s'pos'n' some dick gets nosey?"

"Tell him, of course!" jeered Yarrow. "Turn your little white soul inside out, if you want to keep Adams company."

"Anything else you want to know?" asked Slocum, too depressed to show resentment. "I got to go."

"Anything else I ought to know?" inquired Yarrow.

Slocum stared thoughtfully at the ring he was making on the wet table with the bottom of his glass, and answered slowly—

"No-o; nothing I think of now."

"Trying to hold out on me, hey?"

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"Huh?"

Slocum looked up quickly, startled, then tried to resume his decoration of the table top, but found his hand too shaky.

"Come across! Come across!" snarled the investigator.

"What you talking about?" demanded the other, failing pitifully in his attempt at indignation.

"I want to know about the man you saw leaving the gate when you was rolling your pill."

"How do you know I saw him?"

"You must've, if your eyes and ears are as good as you say—or that cop was lying."

"Holdane told the truth," said Slocum after a moment's hesitation. "I saw him, too."

"Who'd you think it was?"

"Mr. Adams," was the unwilling answer. "But if you try to use it against him, I'll swear I never saw him."

"You're as bad as Ben," sneered Yarrow. "What makes all you ginks so soft on Adams?"

"He's white," said Slocum, and refused to explain further.

"You sure it was Adams?"

"I wish to God I wasn't!"

"Then you think he done it?"

"No—but it looks like he had the chance."

"Did you speak to him?"

"No. I was going to call good night, and then I remembered his quarreling with Miss Ann and thought maybe he wouldn't feel like talking to any one on our side that night."

"Mighty sweet and thoughtful of you," sneered Yarrow. "You didn't see his face, then?"

"Not clear. I got a glimpse of it as he turned onto the sidewalk. I wouldn't swear to it."

"When he hit the sidewalk, which way did he turn?"

"Left."

"The devil!" remarked Yarrow with uncalled-for pettishness.

CHAPTER XIV

RIGHT OR LEFT

"WHAT d' you know about that?" asked Yarrow, when he had repeated Slocum's confession.

Hart examined the smudgy monogram on his cigaret and wondered how long it would be before he should be able to afford a more expensive design.

"What do you think now about Decker's being the murderer?" was his reply.

The investigator shook his head disgustedly.

"I ain't so sure he didn't have the time——"

"That's certainly open to question," agreed Hart. "A cigaret is rather an unreliable timepiece. If Decker happened to find a weapon handy—" Hart winked at his grinning partner—"he might easily have done the job, even in the short time he was out of Slocum's sight. The important point in Slocum's whole story is his seeing the murderer leave the house."

"You sure it was the murderer?"

"It's a hundred to one shot. The blood on Decker's hands was fresh, remember; and the time coincides with all we know."

"If Slocum'd only spoke to him!" groaned Yarrow.

"You ought to bless your luck he didn't. If he'd known that he had been seen and recognized, he'd have cleared out in a hurry. And he had a good ten hours start, remember. As it is, the safest place for him just at present is right here in Chicago. Nobody knows where to look for him here, or whom to look for. The newspapers have told him that Adams has been indicted for the job, so he knows that he's safe till the police get a new clue."

"Providing he don't tumble that we're on his trail."

"I'm not worrying about that," said Hart, and added one of the rare compliments with which he occasionally tickled his partner's vanity—"You're too good a shadow, Jeff, to allow that."

"I'm working in the dark on a cold scent," retorted the investigator with a growl intended to conceal his gratification. "You sure as ever of Adams? Slocum thought it was him."

"He couldn't see as well as Holdane, and the officer wasn't certain. They both named Adams because he seemed to fit into the evidence. But, in my estimation, the big point to Adams's credit is the fact that they both said the man turned to the left on leaving the house. Adams *thought* he turned to the right, as usual, you remember. Holdane was sure the man turned to the left; but his unsupported testimony wasn't

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much more valuable than Adams's. Now Slocum comes along and says the man turned to the left—and immediately that fact becomes of immense importance in our investigation."

"Seems to me you believe just as much of Adams's spiel as you want to," objected Yarrow.

"I believe only what my analytical mind tells me is probably true," answered Hart with the air of superiority that never failed to move Yarrow to wrath. "It's my business to winnow the lies from the facts."

"You're wasting your wind," retorted Yarrow.

"And you, my dear Jeff, are forgetting one very important fact of psychology: When a man is suffering from a great mental shock, he does not necessarily act contrary to his custom; on the contrary, he's more apt to follow habit slavishly."

"Meaning, I s'pose," sneered Yarrow, "the crazier Adams was, the safer bet it was that he'd turn to the right as per usual?"

"Exactly! On the other hand, the fact that the stranger did turn to the left is additional proof that he was the murderer. He knew that he could get away much quicker if he turned the other way and took a car——"

"'Less he come in a buzz wagon," suggested Yarrow with sudden interest.

Hart stopped his harangue, momentarily dumfounded; but his analytical brain quickly leaped that obstruction.

"But we know he didn't. If there had been a car, Officer Holdane certainly would have seen it and mentioned the fact at the inquest. You must give the police credit for not overlooking such details. But even if there was a car waiting east of the house, it merely clinches my argument that the murderer turned to the left for safety, while we have every reason to believe that Adams turned right as usual."

"A' right," submitted Yarrow with a dreary yawn. "I ain't convinced, but they's no use arguing with you. You muddle a proposition up so you got its head chasing its tail round the room, like a cat throwing fits. What you want me to do?"

"Watch the Cuckoo's Nest. I want a record of every person that goes into or leaves the house in the next week, and which way he turns."

"I s'pose," sneered Yarrow, "you're figuring to get Tracy to let Adams out for a nice little holiday, so's he can promenade round the house for my benefit."

"Never mind Adams. I know all I want to about him. Then—I hate to mention it, Jeff," Hart's tone was genuinely apologetic, "but we must get some definite line on why Barlow and Decker were always quarreling."

"I asked the crazy man," sneered Yarrow, quick to make the most of Hart's unusual humility. "Mebbe you'd like me to pump the dead one?"

"I want you to go over the Cuckoo's Nest again."

"I could locate every fly-speck with my eyes shut," objected Yarrow.

"You might get something out of Ben."

"I might—with dynamite."

"Of course, it's going to be hard work; and I know you're all in——"

Yarrow interrupted with a belligerent grunt and snatched up his hat.

"I'm all in when you see me in a box. Save up your weeps till then, my dear Valentine. Want me to go on watch tonight?"

"If you don't mind."

Yarrow scorned the commiseration with another grunt.

"Here goes, then."

IT WAS eight o'clock the following morning when Yarrow knocked gently at the back door of the Barlow side. All through the sultry Summer night he had dodged about the front of the Cuckoo's Nest; more than once he had stood so close to Holdane or his relief that either officer could have touched him by putting out a hand; yet neither had had a suspicion of his presence in the neighborhood. As it was, the patrolmen were sufficiently troublesome, for they had evidently received their own orders to keep sharp watch of the Cuckoo's Nest. Yarrow's one bit of luck was the fact that he was expected to watch only the front door.

For that very reason he had chosen to make his entrance at the back; and he had approached so cautiously that even his light knock startled the inmates. He chuckled softly as he heard the nervous clatter with which Ben dropped his fork and pushed back his chair.

"'Morning!" was Yarrow's cheerful greeting, as Ben appeared behind the screen door. "Could you give an old friend a bite o' what smells so good?"

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The words and the compliment were meant for the cook's ears; but the emphatic wink that accompanied them were intended for Ben's eyes and his memory.

For a moment Ben was puzzled to remember where he had seen that grin and those keen eyes before. In the days intervening since the murder, Ben had encountered so many strangers that he was not sure of the identity of this one. Nevertheless, something in Yarrow's manner induced him to take a chance.

"Why, I guess so," he said not ungraciously, as he unlatched the screen door, "if cook don't mind."

"Any friend of yours is welcome, Ben," called the pleased cook, already bustling to set an extra place.

"Never knew a good cook yet wasn't good-natured," laughed Yarrow, as he gave the still wondering Ben another impressive wink. "How you making it, Ben? Don't believe I've seen you since the morning of the murder."

"That's right," assented Ben, shaking hands with vigorous warmth.

He remembered the man well enough now—remembered how he, eavesdropping outside the little back room on that terrible morning, had heard Adams warned against answering Tracy's questions; but to save his life he could not recall the man's name. Nevertheless, Ben undertook the introduction without a sign of hesitation, certain that the stranger would supply the lacking information.

"Cook, this is my friend Mr.——"

"Oh, cut out the 'Mr.'," laughed Yarrow. "'Jeff's' good enough for my friends, if cook won't think I'm getting fresh."

"Cook's got sense," Ben growled.

"It's a good thing cook has," sniffed that lady with a poor pretense of huffiness. "I only hope the eggs are as fresh."

And with that she proceeded to set out for Yarrow a breakfast worthy of the appetite he brought to it.

"What's the game?" demanded Ben, when they were smoking their morning pipes together by one of the front windows in the bare living-room where Barlow had met his tragic death.

And, keeping an eye on the cement walk leading to the gate, Yarrow gave Ben such information as he considered necessary to secure the latter's co-operation. That was not much, for all that Ben cared to know was that Yarrow & Hart were working to free the young master from an unjust accusation.

"I'm with you," announced Ben with curt emphasis. "What d' you want me to do?"

"Stand watch and watch with me—mebbe for a week—till we get the dope on whoever uses the front door. We got to handle it so's nobody gets next, understand, not even cook. So I better take the night trick. You can divvy the time with me during the day."

"Where'll you sleep?" asked the practical Ben.

"Anything the matter with bunking in with you?"

"No-o. I guess not."

"How about cook—is she the nosey kind?"

"Cook's got sense," repeated Ben. "Jolly her along, like you been doing, and she'll never bat an eye."

"She don't hang round this room much, hey?"

"No. She believes in haunts—a little."

Yarrow yawned, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and stood up stretching.

"Any objections to me hitting the feathers?"

"I'll show you the way," offered Ben.

Yarrow followed meekly, for he did not consider it necessary to inform Ben that he could have found his way about the house in the dark.

"I s'pose," he yawned, as he sat on the bed pulling off his shoes, "you told all you knew at the inquest?"

"Why wouldn't I?"

"Was you really rubbering at the door that night, when the old man and Adams had their big blow-up?"

Ben pondered a moment with his eyes on his questioner.

"I was," he finally admitted. "What of it?"

"That what made you think Adams done it?"

"How d'you know?" began the bewildered Ben.

"You just told me," grinned Yarrow, gently pushing the caretaker out of the door.

IT WAS about two o'clock when Yarrow reappeared below-stairs. He was still yawning, and he confessed to possessing a most remarkable appetite. Cook laughed good-humoredly at

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his audacious hints and assured him that any one so appreciative should have the best that she could furnish. She sat down with him, too, at his urgent invitation, to join him in a cup of her wonderful tea; and she displayed a friendly yet discreet interest in him that delighted the investigator to the depths of his designing heart.

"Got a good thing here, you and Ben," commented Yarrow.

Cook nodded affirmation over the rim of her cup.

"Not much like it used to was, I guess?"

"I should say not! Mr. Barlow was—Well, he's dead, poor man; and I ain't one to talk against them that's gone."

"Didn't keep you any busier than you keep yourself, hey? I never in my life see such a spick-and-span house. Making work, I call it; but I've noticed it's a sign of a smart woman."

Cook tossed her head a little and winked to indicate that she knew well enough she was being jollied.

"Anybody might think," pursued Yarrow, with a quizzical smile in his keen eyes, "that you was looking for something besides dirt."

"Meaning what?" demanded cook, looking him straight in the eye.

"Well, they's a will that ain't turned up. Mr. Bertram'd pay real money for it, I hear."

Cook nodded but did not speak.

"Not that it's any o' my business," added Yarrow.

"No, it ain't," she agreed imperturbably. "But I don't mind telling you, Jeff, that I would like to find that will; though that ain't what I'm always chasing dirt for."

"What is it for, then?" asked Yarrow, who was frankly curious on the point.

"Well—" cook hesitated. "I'm trying to get the house sweet against the time when Mr. Adams brings Miss Ann here as his bride."

"Well!" Yarrow was, as he would have put it, "completely flabbergasted."

"You wait and see," was the enigmatic retort, as cook went about her self-imposed duties.

Yarrow followed her toward the front of the house; but he left her in the hall, dusting half nervously around the silent cuckoo-clock, while he went in to join Ben in the living-room.

"Miss Ann's going out with Welding again," announced the watcher, without taking his eyes from the front walk.

Yarrow peered over Ben's shoulder and saw that Welding was carefully helping the girl into a gray runabout.

"Good thing," commented the investigator. "She needs to get out once in a while."

"So does Mr. Adams," growled Ben, as he followed the departing car with brooding eyes.

Yarrow filled and lighted his pipe before he spoke.

"How long's that been going on?" he asked at length.

"Ever since Mr. Adams was taken off—more or less. Welding's always hanging round."

"Getting jealous, ain't you?" scoffed Yarrow. "Thought you didn't have no use for the Deckers, hey?"

"I ain't," muttered the other. "But she's Mr. Adams's girl."

CHAPTER XV

A LUCKY FIND

FOR three days Yarrow and Ben spelled one another at Barlow's front window, while cook prepared them wonderful meals and proved by her unquestioning silence that she merited Ben's encomiums upon her discretion.

Each afternoon Yarrow slipped away for an hour or two to meet Slocum at Jake's place, only to be disappointed; and each time, upon his return to the Cuckoo's Nest, Ben reported with growing glumness that Welding had called again with the gray runabout. True, on the second day, the car stood in front of the house unused; but cook admitted with a suspicious sniff that Ann had entertained Welding in the arbor while her father slept.

The situation suited Yarrow no better than it did Adams's two faithful adherents. In order to avoid arousing the suspicions of the watchful police, the investigator was forced to keep his presence in the house a strict secret, and to use the greatest precautions when leaving or entering; and one or two narrow escapes had made him nervous lest he be detected before he should accomplish his purpose. Nor did Yarrow relish the growing conviction that Slocum

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was deliberately avoiding him. Accordingly, on the afternoon of the fourth day, when he entered the bare living-room after his belated luncheon, he was resolved upon action.

"There's that——car again!" growled Ben in greeting. "If she goes out with him again——"

"If she does, I'm going in next door," growled the investigator, and he sat down to smoke until the gray runabout should leave him a clear field.

But as on the second day, the car continued to stand at the curb, unused, while the investigator fretted at the delay. Finally cook, who was beginning to see some reason in this unceasing watchfulness, stuck her head into the room in passing to announce—

"Them two are at it again in the arbor."

"That's my chance!" cried Yarrow, standing up and knocking the ashes out of his pipe. "They're good for an hour, anyhow. Know where Decker is?"

"Asleep, I guess. Slocum's smoking on the porch."

"I'll beat it out the back way, then, and come in the front gate like I belonged."

"Careful which way you turn," warned Ben, without a smile. "I'm keeping tab."

"Good for you!" laughed Yarrow. "But it's rubber-necking cops I'm shy of just now."

A few minutes later, having made sure that Welding and Ann were comfortably ensconed in the arbor, Yarrow escaped by the back way unseen, and walked coolly up the front steps and accosted Slocum before that startled young man was conscious of his approach.

"What you doing here?" demanded the nurse uneasily.

"Thought mebbe you was sick," answered Yarrow, shaking hands with friendly violence. "Why ain't you been down to Jake's these last few days? On the wagon again?"

"Yes!" reported the nurse defiantly. "And I'm going to stay on, believe me!"

"Mebbe it's just as well," agreed his friend. "You been talking too much lately." And before Slocum had fully recovered from that shock, Yarrow proceeded to give him another— "Where's Decker?"

"Asleep. You ain't going to devil him again, and that's flat!"

"Don't want to. But I'm going to frisk his desk while he's pounding his ear."

"Not much!" was the frightened answer.

"Now, listen, and don't fly off the handle so. Ain't forgot what you told me the other day, hey?"

Slocum shook his head, and swallowed hard.

"All I want's a little information. Anything I find ain't going to hurt Decker, mind you. You just see I ain't caught from the outside, and I'll have my hooks on what I'm after in a jiffy."

And, without waiting for further argument, Yarrow passed into the Decker living-room.

Decker's desk was locked, as he had expected, but that was no obstacle. A moment's work with a delicate little instrument that Yarrow always carried—it made an excellent pipe-cleaner on occasion—put him in possession of all the secrets that the desk contained. The search was thorough but swift, and made with a care that left no betraying mark, no suspicious disarrangement of the contents of drawer or pigeonhole. It was also fairly satisfactory in its results.

The stubs of Decker's check-books bore frequent records of large sums of money paid over to Henry Barlow, without stating the purpose of the payments; but there were no records of corresponding deposits which might have indicated that these sums had brought cash returns. There were other papers—penciled memoranda and canceled notes—which showed both that Decker was a poor business man and that he had been regularly contributing to Barlow's bank account. While there was no actual record to justify such a suspicion, Yarrow got the impression that Barlow had been deliberately bleeding his old friend.

Searching for confirmation of this suspicion, the investigator was startled by feeling the floor quiver under his feet. He had heard nothing—his ears were not sufficiently acute to catch delicate sounds—but he knew that some one had entered the room behind his back. His feet had detected the telltale quiver of the floor under the step of the intruder.

Without betraying that he was startled, Yarrow turned partly about, as if to get a better light on the paper he was examining, and discovered Decker standing in the doorway leading from the hall. Decker's felt slippers had enabled him to move so noiselessly that he had escaped the notice

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of Slocum, but his weight had betrayed his approach to the sensitive nerves of the deaf man.

Seeing that he was observed, Decker came into the room, softly rubbing his hands together.

"It's not there," he said with a genial smile.

"What ain't here?" Yarrow was startled into asking.

"He's been all through that desk more than once," was the indefinite answer.

"Who you talking about?"

Silently Decker jerked his head toward the other side of the house.

"You mean Barlow?"

"He was crazy—crazier than I ever was," was the astounding remark. "You don't seem to care," added Decker with evident disappointment.

"Seeing I wasn't looking for anything in particular, why should I?" asked Yarrow, utterly incapable of deciding how to meet this queer man who expressed no anger at finding a stranger rifling his private papers.

"It's not there," was the placid rejoinder.

"Maybe you know where it is, then?"

Decker nodded and chuckled.

"Mind telling me what you did with it?"

"It's safe."

Yarrow returned the paper which he had been examining to the exact place where he found it, looked to see that everything else was in position, and quickly crossed the room to face Decker.

"Remember me, don't you, Mr. Decker?"

Decker pulled back the lapel of Yarrow's coat, tapped the detective shield, and laughed knowingly. He made no other answer.

"Yes, I'm a detective," admitted Yarrow. "And I'm here on business. Perhaps you can guess?"

Decker laughed again, as if he were hearing a most enjoyable story.

"I'm looking for Mr. Barlow's will," continued Yarrow. "Do you know where it is?"

"He's looked there—often," repeated Decker.

In an effort to hold his wandering attention, the investigator laid his hand on Decker's arm.

"Mr. Decker, didn't you steal that will and hide it away somewhere in Mr. Barlow's house? Isn't that why you're always trying to get in there?"

Decker cocked his head on one side and pointed a bony finger at the questioner.

"Ha! Ha!" he chuckled. "You're a detective!"

"Like —— I am!" growled Yarrow and stalked out.

"I'LL watch now," said the investigator gruffly, as he returned to the front window, after again dodging the police.

"Meet Welding?" asked Ben incuriously.

"Welding?"

"He's gone, ten minutes ago. Funny you didn't hear him start his engine."

"I was busy," said Yarrow briefly. He spoke absently, for he was figuring that Welding must have left while he was talking with Decker, and he wondered why Ann had not come in and caught him.

"He was in the devil of a hurry," continued Ben. "Guess they must 'a' had a scrap. He looked like he could chew up scrap-iron and enjoy it."

"Which way did he go?"

"Left, but I guess that don't count, 'cause his car was headed that way."

"Lord!" groaned Yarrow. "And me wasting time trying to crack a nut!"

"Cook says Miss Ann's bawling her eyes out in the arbor," concluded Ben with grim satisfaction. "Guess they scrapped all right."

Then, seeing that his friend was too disappointed to be interested, Ben drew from his pocket a folded paper which he passed to Yarrow.

"What d' you make of that?" he asked with no show of curiosity.

Yarrow unfolded the grimy paper with little interest, but his first glance at its contents set his eyes to sparkling; and, when he had finished reading, he was rarely excited.

"Holy Mike!" he exclaimed. "What a find!"

"Looked that way to me," agreed Ben, though his tone was commonplace.

"Where'd you find it?"

"In the cuckoo-clock!"

"Wow!" gasped Yarrow. "And I didn't have sense enough to think of that."

"Cook wanted the clock cleaned," explained Ben. "But she said she was afraid she'd get it out of order. That ain't what she was afraid of, though. So I cleaned it for her, while I was waiting for you. There's

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a door in the back, so's you can get at the works. Inside the door is a big gong—a spiral spring, it is. It's for striking the hour."

"No wonder Decker don't like 'em."

"The boss didn't like the gong, neither. Said it made so much racket he couldn't hear the birds sing. So he muffled it with a wad of paper."

"This paper?"

"This was part of the wad—inside the rest."

"Guess it ain't something he just happened to pick up, then," grinned Yarrow. "How'd you tumble to it?"

"Just tumbled. I was going to chuck it away, it was so dirty. Then I remembered how careful he was of the clock and thought maybe he'd hid something there."

"Did cook see it?"

"She don't even know I found anything?"

"Good for you! S'pose you can stick it out a little longer, Ben? I got to run the guard again, and get this over to Hart right away."

"Sure, I'll stick. But what is that thing, anyhow?"

"This thing?" Yarrow tenderly patted the pocket in which he had placed the precious paper. "Why, Ben, this is what I was hunting for next door, only I didn't know it."

CHAPTER XVI

ANN DECIDES

"JUST a little spin along the lake," urged Welding. He had found Ann idling in the arbor, and was happily unconscious that he was being spied upon from the Barlow side.

"I don't think I'd better go again today," replied Ann, swinging her fan with a languid air.

"Just half an hour? It's lots cooler along the lake."

Ann watched her swaying fan and made no answer. Welding stopped its motion by catching her hand, but he could not make her look at him.

"Please, Ann?"

Ann disengaged her hand and set her fan to swaying again.

"I'd rather you'd call me Miss Decker, if you'll be so kind."

"Why—certainly," stammered Welding.

Moodily he seated himself on the bench, thrust his hands into the pockets of his flannel coat, and gazed at her. She made a picture good to look upon, sitting there in the perfumed shade of her garden cozy-corner. But she was too aloof, too indifferent to his presence, too languidly intent on her swaying fan. Somehow, with never a word nor a glance, she contrived to convey the impression that she would have been just as well content if he were elsewhere.

"What's the trouble?" he asked presently. "You were never like this before."

Ann was never one to beat about the bush. Life had too long required her to meet unpleasant facts face to face. So now she simply said:

"The neighbors are making remarks about your coming here so much—with—under the circumstances. And you must admit there's some reason for gossip, when my father's friend insists on spending most of his time with me."

"You're cruel, Ann."

"Please——"

"Miss Decker, then. Is there any reason why I shouldn't come to see you?"

"Haven't you forgotten that, less than a month ago, I was engaged to be married—to another man?"

"No, I haven't forgotten," answered Welding sullenly.

"Then you must see that the neighbors might even think—" She faltered and flushed; then finished bravely, "they might even think I'd thrown him over for you, just because he's in trouble."

"What do you want me to do—stop coming?" Welding put the question brutally, for he was too hurt to choose his words.

"You can do a good deal, if you will," retorted Ann, with a flash of temper. "For one thing, you can try to appreciate my position. Oh, I'm not trying to throw the blame on you," she added quickly, seeing that he was about to make an indignant protest. "I shouldn't have let you—but it was good to have a friend to talk things over with. I never thought how it might look to the neighbors, or you."

"You know now," he said curtly, refusing in any way to help her out.

"Now you're cruel!" she cried.

Her obvious distress broke through the man's sense of personal injury, and he leaned quickly toward her, all contrition.

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"I'm sorry, Ann, but you hurt me terribly; and I—I love you, Ann!"

"No!" she protested faintly. "It's impossible!"

"I should say it was perfectly natural," he retorted, gaining confidence and hope from her confusion.

"But it's unfair!"

"Unfair to whom?"

"To—Fred!"

Welding hardly smothered the oath that rose to his lips.

"What's he got to do with it? You told me yourself that was all over. Fred's a fine fellow, as I've always said. I don't know yet why you quarreled with him. But you did quarrel, seriously, you told me; and I can't see that I'm to blame for thinking I had a perfect right to make love to you myself."

Brave words they were, spoken with all manliness; but somehow they did not impress Ann as wholly sincere.

"You make me despise myself!" she sobbed.

"Why? What have I said or done to justify that? Ann, I've loved you ever since I first met you—that day in the carriage."

"I didn't know——"

"I didn't intend you should. I'd never have said a word, if you hadn't quarreled with Fred. Perhaps I should have gone slower; but my business in Chicago is about done and I couldn't go without knowing."

"You know now," she said dully.

"Indeed I don't!" he cried, springing to his feet and crossing to her. "I'm not asking you to answer me today. I wouldn't accept even your 'Yes' as final today. You're surprised, startled. I almost think you're frightened."

"I am," she whispered.

Welding laughed and shrugged.

"Take time to think it over. Think of what your life is going to be a few years from now. Your father won't be any better, Ann——"

"In a few years he'll be gone," she answered with a lack of emotion that showed that she had already steeled herself against that time.

"What will you do then? You'll have no family, no friends. You've cut yourself off from all that. You know I don't want your money. I want you, Ann—the tender, loving, trusting woman who fills my thoughts, night and day. I want you for my wife. I want to shield you against the world, dear."

"But, if I didn't love you——"

"I'm not at all sure you don't love me this blessed minute; but I'll devote my life to making you happy—and love will come, dear. It must come!"

He was bending over her, unconsciously stretching out his yearning arms for her. Something in his attitude, in his eyes and voice, frightened her anew. She drew back, almost with loathing.

"I don't love you."

"All in good time," he assured her tenderly.

She shook her head wearily and turned away as if the sight of him had become repugnant.

"It can't be, Mr. Welding. I know you mean to be kind—you are kind. But it's impossible. I never could love—any one else."

Welding made a quick gesture of exasperation; but there was only pleading in his voice, as he seated himself on the bench beside her.

"But that's all over, Ann. You mustn't let a mistake spoil your life. You're young. You'll soon forget."

Again she shook her head.

"I've tried to forget—and I can't."

"Can't forget what—Fred? But you don't love him, Ann."

"I don't know."

"I know!" Welding was aroused now, fighting for his own love; and he spoke more brutally than he knew. "Why, you haven't been near him but once since he was taken away. Could you have done that if you still loved him?"

"It's that that makes me afraid," she answered. "I'm thinking of him all the time, wishing I was with him to comfort him, trying to think of some way to help him."

"But we're all doing that," persisted Welding; "and we're going to save him, too."

"And I want him so," she murmured, as if she had not heard. "I want him so!"

Welding stumbled to his feet. His face was white with anger and agony, and his fists were clenched.

"You're talking nonsense!" he said roughly. "Why, you told me yourself he

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ordered you to keep away. You're nothing to him!"

"I don't believe it!" she cried in quick protest, and her face lighted up with sudden exaltation. "I don't believe it! He was only doing it to save me from humiliation."

"If he really cared, don't you suppose he'd move heaven and earth to prove himself innocent, instead of rotting there in idleness? Wouldn't he do it for your sake, if not for his own?"

"He'd do whatever he thought was right," she said with infinite faith, "just as he's doing now."

With an effort Welding repressed an angry reply and fell to pacing the short smooth turf. Under his scowling brows he stole yearning glances at her and saw a vision of womanly love and faith that made him all the more eager to win her by whatever means he must use.

"Ann," he demanded, stopping abruptly before her, "are you sure you're not letting yourself be carried away by sympathy for an old friend who's in trouble?"

"I'm sure," she answered simply.

"You need to be," he retorted with something of a sneer curling his tight lips. "Have you thought what it will mean to you, if—if he shouldn't be acquitted?"

She paled and shivered, but answered undauntedly:

"I haven't thought of much else—these last few days. His case comes up in a week; and if we don't do something in the meantime, he's sure to be found guilty!"

"What will you do then—marry him in jail?"

"If he'll let me."

"My God!" groaned Welding. "I think you've gone crazy. There's one thing to be thankful for—Adams will never listen to that."

"Suppose we leave that to him—and the future," retorted Ann. "For the present, I'm chiefly interested in what I can do to get him free. I've decided to engage Yarrow & Hart."

"Lots of good that'll do!" jeered Welding. "They'll only bleed you dry, and let him take what's coming to him."

"I should have done it before," she continued unheeding. "I felt it all the time, but I let you dissuade me. I don't know why you did it," she finished with reproach in eyes and voice.

"To keep you from wasting your money," he retorted roughly. "Those fellows are cheap fakers. But you'll do as you please, of course," he added wearily.

"I can't do anything else," she pleaded, as if for the first time conscious that she had hurt him.

"Of course not. We won't argue about it." Welding took up his hat and braced himself for the parting. "You're sure now of your feelings toward Adams?"

"Sure," she answered softly. "I—I don't believe they ever really changed. I'm dreadfully sorry."

"That's all right," said the man, trying to hide his hurt. "It wasn't your fault, I was mistaken. I—do you want me to stop coming, Ann?"

"Stop coming? Why should I?"

"The neighbors——"

"They'd only talk more, and poor father would miss you."

"I'll be glad to drop in occasionally, for your father's sake," he answered gravely, though there was a new light in his brooding eyes.

"Please do. You'll always be welcome."

Welding bowed formally and turned toward his waiting car. Then, with sudden determination, he went back and bent over her again.

"Ann, I want to give you one last warning—don't let yourself be duped by Yarrow & Hart. And whatever you decide, be careful how you fish in muddied waters."

CHAPTER XVII

SOME SURPRISES

WHEN Hart induced his partner to take the Barlow case "on spec," he acted against his own better judgment; but for once he had been tempted to take the long chance. Unfortunately, Yarrow & Hart's bank-account seldom attained to the dignity of four figures; and matters had now reached the point where the figures on the pad before Hart promised little for the future.

Having once undertaken the Barlow case, they had been forced to decline several minor commissions, such as hitherto had helped to keep things going; and Hart was no longer sure that they should be justified in continuing the case at their own expense. True, they had in their possession certain facts, apparently unguessed by the police,

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which convinced the analyst that they were on the trail of the murderer; but none knew better than he that these facts were as yet far too scattered and indeterminate to convince a jury.

If there were a reward out for the murderer, Hart felt that they would be justified in exhausting their bank balance and their credit in continuing the search. But as it was Yarrow & Hart must not only discover the guilty person, but also trust to finding some interested party who would pay for the information. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Hart bent a rueful countenance over the scratch pad that showed all too plainly the precarious condition of their finances.

Hart's indecision was increased by the knowledge that some one was fumbling at the door, preparatory to entering the office. If it proved to be a possible client, should the manager declare Yarrow & Hart ready to undertake the commission, or should he heroically refuse to be diverted from the case that was to have made them famous? Before Hart could answer that question—before he could decide how he wanted to answer it—the moving door swung open and admitted Franklin Welding to the waiting-room.

Hart had so placed his desk that he could size up any one entering before he should himself be discovered. This precaution permitted him to observe the disdain with which Welding surveyed the dingy, barren offices, and so gave him an opportunity to decide what attitude he should assume. But it was instinct as much as cunning that prompted him to take the urbanely bombastic pose that seemed to be his by nature.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Welding!" he boomed unctuously, as he advanced with welcoming hand. "Glad to meet you again, sir, very glad indeed! Take this chair, please. Perhaps I shouldn't call it comfortable, but it's the best I can offer you."

Welding perfunctorily shook the offered hand and accepted the best chair with a slight nod of acknowledgment. The chair was drawn companionably close to Hart's, and Welding let his eyes wander for a moment over the scarred desk. It is needless to say that he saw there neither the pad that proclaimed the financial stringency of Yarrow & Hart, nor anything that even remotely suggested the Barlow case. If Welding were disappointed, he did not show it. He fixed his cool glance upon Hart while he proceeded lesiurely to draw off his driving gloves.

"You remember me, I see," he remarked in answer to Hart's effusive greeting.

"I do indeed, sir! I've often laughed with my partner over our little fencing match at Miss Decker's. And how's the dear little lady finding herself these days?"

"Miss Decker is well, thank you," answered Welding, after a cold stare intended to make Hart realize that his question showed a deplorable lack of taste.

"And that poor Mr. Adams? I hope you can give an interested friend more cheering news of his case than we get from the papers?"

For a moment Welding gazed at his eager questioner as if endeavoring to decide whether the man was ignorant or impertinent. Finally he answered icily:

"You have a city telephone at your elbow, Mr. Hart. You'll find Mr. Bertram listed under the head 'Attorneys' in the classified section of the telephone directory. He's acting for Mr. Adams, and I've no doubt he would be very glad to relieve your mind regarding your friend."

The analyst stared, then threw back his head and gave vent to a roar of perfectly natural laughter.

"Well, well, Mr. Welding, that's a lot of words to waste saying, 'I don't know.' But perhaps that's the way you do things down East."

"What makes you think I come from the East?" demanded the other with an abruptness that smacked of suspicion.

"Both your manner and your manner of speaking," was the somewhat surprising answer. "But come, Mr. Welding, you didn't come here just to pass the time of day with a busy man?"

"N—no," hesitated Welding; "I—I came on business."

"If you're selling anything——"

"I sell real estate, sometimes," grinned Welding, apparently pleased to find that the man was, after all, only an unmannered fool. "But that's not my errand today. Mr. Hart, you have referred to our last meeting at Miss Decker's home. Apparently you've not forgotten that I made pretty plain my opinion of the ability of Yarrow & Hart?"

"A man's not likely to forget that sort of

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thing," answered Hart with a grin that proved he bore no malice.

"Would anything I said then prevent your undertaking an investigation for me?"

"Not in the least," was the prompt reply. "If you're willing to pay our fee, I shan't worry about your private opinion."

"I should want your agreement, in writing, not to undertake the same case for any other party, no matter how closely allied our interests might appear to be."

"That's our invariable policy. Yarrow & Hart never accept two commissions on the same case."

"I'm glad to know that. I suppose I'm safe in assuming that Yarrow & Hart are equally secretive about any business that may be intrusted to them?"

"You are!" answered Hart stiffly.

"What is your usual fee for undertaking an investigation?"

"Of what nature?"

"That I can't tell you—just yet."

Hart shook his big head impatiently.

"You'll have to trust us, Mr. Welding, just as you'd trust your lawyer or doctor. That's the only way we can work."

Welding shrugged his shoulders and spent a moment in thought before he proceeded:

"Very well. The case I have in mind is the Barlow murder." Welding paused as if he expected some expression of surprise from Hart, but the analyst only grinned at him. "And I want you to undertake it in the interests of Miss Decker."

"You're acting as Miss Decker's agent?"

"No-o, hardly that. The fact is that Miss Decker is alarmed—unduly alarmed, I think—over the idea that the same person who murdered Barlow may have a similar grudge against her father and try to kill him, too."

"But how can he? According to the police and the newspapers, Barlow was murdered by Adams who's to be tried on the charge in a few days."

Welding waved the suggestion aside impatiently. "That theory may do for the police and the newspapers, but it's my impression, Mr. Hart, that you were one of the first to declare Adams' innocence."

"I still believe in it," affirmed Hart.

"Good! Then I'm only asking you to prove what you already believe. I shall be very glad if you can do that; but you must understand, Mr. Hart, that the most important thing with me is to relieve Miss Decker of this worry about her father."

"But in order to reassure Miss Decker, mustn't we either produce evidence to convict the real murderer or else prove that he's dead and harmless?"

"Yes, I suppose so," admitted Welding, fumbling with his gloves. "But I thought you could set a guard over Mr. Decker——"

Hart shook his head with a tolerant smile.

"Neither my partner nor myself would consider serving in the capacity of policeman; and all the guards you could pack into the Cuckoo's Nest wouldn't stop the murderer, if he wanted to repeat. No, Mr. Welding, take the word of a man who's made a life study of crime—the only sure defense against such a man as Barlow's murderer is to get the man himself."

"By Jove! I believe you're right!" exclaimed Welding. "But can you do it? You still stick to your belief that Adams is not the guilty man. Do you know who is?"

"Not yet—but we're on his track."

"You've continued to work on the case?" questioned Welding with a sharp look at the speaker.

"Of course. Yarrow & Hart never quit a case until they've solved it."

Brave words, these, spoken with as much assurance as though Hart had not been interrupted at the moment when he had practically decided to abandon the search; but that is the difference between continuing an unprofitable case "on spec," and opportunely finding a client who is willing and able to pay the cost.

"What have you discovered?" was Welding's eager question.

"You can't expect me to answer that, Mr. Welding. Our knowledge is our stock in trade, and we don't do a retail business. Our client must place himself unreservedly in our hands. Those are the only terms upon which we'll undertake the investigation."

"I suppose that's business," admitted Welding most reluctantly.

"What makes Miss Decker think her father's in danger?"

"It's just a woman's fancy, I imagine. I'm taking this step only to be able to prove to her that her fears are groundless."

"Then you're acting on your own hook?"

"Yes—as a friend of Mr. Decker. Apparently there's no one else to do it."

"It's common talk that Decker's told

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you all about how he and Barlow got their start out West."

"That's a popular delusion. Mr. Decker talks to me by the hour, it's true, but it's all vague and rambling."

"Then you can't give me any clue to the murderer?"

"No. I'm sorry, but I didn't know Barlow—never even saw him—except at a distance."

"You don't suspect either of the Deckers?"

"Of course not!" was the indignant retort. "It's absurd to think of suspecting Miss Decker; and her father is as harmless an old bore as I ever met."

"How about Slocum?"

"I hardly know the man."

"You've been calling at the Cuckoo's Nest for some time," suggested Hart in a tone that caused Welding to eye him suspiciously.

"I have," he said stiffly, "but my time has been spent almost altogether with Mr. Decker."

Hart spread out his hands in a helpless gesture.

"There you are, Mr. Welding! You can see for yourself what a blind trail we're following, in trying to catch the man who did for Barlow."

"All the more money and glory for you if you succeed!" retorted the other. "I sha'n't be niggardly, Mr. Hart, if you can relieve Miss Decker of this worry."

"It's our custom to make terms in advance," was the indifferent reply. "Did Decker ever explain his fear of the cuckoo-clock?"

"No."

"Didn't you ask him?"

"Never!" was the indignant answer. "I didn't consider it any of my business."

"That's the disadvantage of being in our profession," sighed Hart. "We must pry into everybody's secrets. Have you any idea whom Officer Holdane saw leaving the house that night?"

"I can't imagine. I've often wondered over it, too."

"You always turn to the right, I suppose?" grinned Hart.

"Always," replied Welding with an answering grin.

"Well," sighed Hart disappointedly, "I don't see that you can help me much."

"I'm sorry, but I don't suppose that will prevent your undertaking the case?"

Hart looked at him with an air of innocent surprise.

"Oh, no! I've already decided not to."

"What?" gasped Welding, starting from his chair. "Not take it?"

Hart shook his big head gravely.

"I can't, Mr. Welding. You see, we're already retained on the case."

"But—but I thought——"

"I'm sorry if I've given you a different impression."

"You deliberately deceived me!" stormed Welding, pacing about the little office. "Why did you ask me so many questions if you weren't going to take the case?"

"Because I wanted to find out what you knew about it," was the cool answer.

The words, and the look that accompanied them, swept Welding's brain clean of any idea that he had ever harbored regarding Hart's lack of shrewdness. For a moment he stood staring down at the baby-faced, mild-appearing man who had tricked him; then, with a short little laugh, he clapped his hand upon Hart's shoulder.

"You're all right!" he declared. "And I want to take back all I ever said about your ability. I'm beginning to think that Miss Decker is right, and that you're the very man to solve this mystery. And that makes me the more anxious to get your signature to a contract."

"I've already told you we're retained on the case."

"By Miss Decker?" demanded Welding with sudden suspicion.

"I must decline to answer, Mr. Welding."

"But look here, Hart," pleaded Welding, "there's no reason why you shouldn't be getting double pay for your trouble. As you yourself said, the best protection we can give Decker is to run down Barlow's murderer—and that's your commission, I take it?"

"It's no use questioning or arguing, Mr. Welding. Yarrow & Hart don't do business that way. And, to be frank with you, I can't understand just why you're so anxious to retain us, after the way you've knocked us."

"I've apologized for that," answered Welding in some confusion. "And I've told you that Miss Decker has faith in you."

"I'm sorry to disappoint Miss Decker,"

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said Hart firmly, "but she had her chance."

The telephone at his elbow jingled and he turned to answer it. Welding, still unconvinced of the analyst's sincerity, watched him keenly, but learned nothing except such as he could guess from Hart's curt words.

"Hello!" called Hart. "Yes, this is Yarrow & Hart—Mr. Hart talking. What? Which case? No. Yes, of course. Tomorrow morning—at nine? Yes, I'll be there—and thank you for calling. Good-by."

Hart replaced the receiver on its hook, made a minute entry in his pocket notebook, and turned to the waiting Welding an impassive face. But if Welding had not been so absorbed in his own disappointment, he might have observed that Hart's forehead was set with tiny pearls of moisture that had not been there before the telephone rang.

"I don't want to appear discourteous," said the analyst, "but I'm a busy man, Mr. Welding——"

"Then your decision's final?" asked the other with both chagrin and despair in his voice.

"Absolutely so. On any other business that you have on hand we'd be pleased to serve you. But we're already retained on the Barlow murder case."

To the disappointed client, there seemed to be a tone of mocking triumph in the analyst's words, and he turned away finally convinced.

"I'll bid you good day, then, Mr. Hart; and good luck to your investigations." And with that he was gone.

THEN Hart—the dignified, the pompous Hart—did a most surprising thing. No sooner had the door clicked shut behind his recent caller than he sprang to his feet, swept out of its hiding-place and into the waste-basket the memorandum of failure over which he had been interrupted, and performed an elephantine but silent dance about the stuffy little office.

Soon finding his breath too short for such unwonted exercise, he wheezily subsided into his chair, lighted one of his monogrammed cigarets, cocked his feet upon the top of his desk—in flagrant violation of his often expressed idea of what posture best became a gentleman—and tried to consider sanely the great news that the telephone had brought him.

Thus his partner found him some time later, surrounded by a foggy circle of half-smoked ciagarets, and gasped and choked in his endeavor properly to appreciate the spectacle.

"What th' devil!"

"Sit down, Jeff, sit down and rest your feet. Try the other corner of the desk. I've had a visitor."

"Looks more like you'd had a fit," was the scornful response, as Yarrow proceeded to make himself comfortable. "Hope you ain't exhausted yourself. You'll want to do it all over again, when you lamp this here paper."

"Your paper can wait," answered Hart with an airy wave of his hand. "I've just had the biggest stroke of luck that ever hit Yarrow & Hart."

"Is—that—so!" drawled Yarrow, staying his hand in its search for the precious paper. "Is—that—so! Well, spill it quick before you bust."

Hart stooped over his waste-basket a moment, then thrust into his partner's hand the memorandum of their financial condition.

"There's how we stand with the bank," he said curtly. "Have you anything to suggest?"

Little used though he was to figures, Yarrow could not fail to understand that brief statement of impending ruin. His brown face blanched and he growled a nasty oath.

"I told you so!" he sneered viciously, lurching belligerently toward his partner. "You would take a case on spec!"

"You're going to quit, then?"

"Going to quit! —— you! I've quit already. We're both done and you know it! I can get a job dodging buzz-wagons with a push-broom, but what'll you do with your soft hands and a hunk o' fat where your muscles ought to be?"

"What'll I be doing?" drawled Hart, blowing smoke-rings at the ceiling. "Well, if you've really quit, I'll be looking for a partner to help me wind up the Barlow case and divide a nice little fortune in fees."

Yarrow realized now that he had been made the butt of a practical joke, and he decided that it would be the last perpetrated upon him by Hart. Very deliberately the investigator rose to his feet, kicked back his chair, and carefully deposited his precious pipe in his pocket.

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As he did so his fingers came in contact with an equally precious paper, and his whole manner changed. He reseated himself, relighted his pipe, and nodded portentously at his partner.

"Spill your big news," he advised with threatening calmness. "If that's a joke God help your widder and orphans!"

Hart laughed shortly. He appeared no whit alarmed; but he came to the point without further trifling—

"Our old friend Franklin Welding dropped in."

"So that's why he was beating it so fast," mused Yarrow. "What'd he want?"

"He wanted to retain us on the Barlow case, in the interests of Miss Decker."

"The Lord be praised!" ejaculated Yarrow with a fervency too great for piety. "Advance me a 'V' on the strength of it, Val. I want to s'prise the old lady with some real eats."

"Unfortunately, I declined to take his money."

"Hey?"

The one brief ejaculation was all that Yarrow could utter; and when he would have risen and fallen upon his crazy partner, he found himself too weak to do more than groan out his agony of soul.

"While we were arguing about it," placidly continued the analyst, "Miss Decker called up and made an appointment with me for tomorrow morning. She wants to pay us money, too, I judge, from what she said."

"And I s'pose you turned her down, too?" groaned Yarrow.

"You know very well I didn't. We're on Easy Street, now, Jeff—nothing to do but find the murderer, and all expenses paid while we're doing it."

"Yeah!" sneered Yarrow. "Nothing to do but work!"

"At least, we'll be working on full stomachs," his partner reminded him.

Yarrow nodded, fondled the paper in his pocket, and asked—

"But what'd you turn Welding down for?"

"I don't exactly know myself. Somehow I had the feeling that he was hoping to get inside information on what we were doing."

"We might 'a' starved," grumbled Yarrow.

"There are worse things than starving," retorted Hart.

"Mebbe," admitted the other, "but I guess I've forgotten 'em. If you'll lemme have that 'V' I'll drop round to the house before I go back on watch."

"Aren't you about through there?" asked Hart with some impatience.

"Any time you say," was the cheerful answer. "Cook sure knows how to fix good victuals, but you're the doctor."

"Make the best of it!" snapped the manager. "The more I think of it, the more I want to know just why Mr. Franklin Welding wanted us to take the case for him. Evidently he was acting entirely without Miss Decker's knowledge."

"Mebbe he didn't want her to know what we know," was Yarrow's idle answer.

"That's just what I'm beginning to think."

"Well, now you got all the important things out the way, lemme show you what Ben found in Barlow's cuckoo-clock."

CHAPTER XVIII

A NEW ACCOUNT

IN RESPONSE to Ann's telephone call, Yarrow and Hart waited upon her at nine o'clock the following morning. As usual, the partners had quarreled over the proper method of conducting the interview, and they arrived at the Cuckoo's Nest in a state of mutual exasperation. They were still sulking when Ann came down to them. Ann attributed their ill-humor to some unexpected development in the case, and her anxiety added not a little to the nervousness under which she was laboring.

"You're very prompt, gentlemen," she said, giving them in turn her hand and a wistful smile. "I hope I may take it as a favorable omen."

"It's simply a matter of business, Miss Decker," said Hart with a politeness that could not conceal his irritation. "You said nine, so we came at nine. Some members of our profession would have kept you waiting half a day in order to impress you with their importance. We wish to assure you that your business is of the first importance to us."

"I'm glad to know that." Ann's tone showed her relief. "I hesitated to call in detectives——"

"Your pardon, Miss Decker," interrupted Hart with his grand air. "But we're not detectives."

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"What?" gasped Ann.

"We exercise the functions of detectives, perhaps," explained Hart urbanely, "but we prefer not to be classed as such. My partner's duty is to gather the facts. I put the facts together, make the necessary deductions, and so produce the criminal and the evidence to convict him."

"If facts ain't evidence—" began Yarrow truculently.

"They are merely facts, until they have been logically collated," was the crushing response.

"I beg your pardon—both your pardons," Ann hastened to say, hoping that she had contrived to hide her smile. "I've never known any detectives, excepting in fiction."

"Fiction!" snorted the partners in perfect accord.

In spite of her growing exasperation, Ann could hardly restrain her laughter.

"Really, gentlemen, if you came here for business——"

Yarrow turned on his partner with a snarl.

"There! See? Now you've got Miss Decker disgusted with us! What difference does it make to us——"

Ann rose with dignity.

"I hardly think this is the place to settle your differences," she suggested.

Alarmed at her manner, Hart sprang to his feet with a nervous stutter of unintelligible apology; but Yarrow pulled him back, laughing.

"Don't mind us, Miss Decker," he said with a wink that was too comical to be resented. "It's only our way of working."

Hart, recovering himself, set her chair for her with gallant courtesy.

"Shall we get to business?" he asked gently.

Ann sank back into her chair and twisted her hands nervously as she spoke.

"I have turned to your firm—against the advice of my friends, understand—because you both impressed me with your honesty: Mr. Hart, when he came to me to offer your services, Mr. Yarrow when he interfered to prevent me from saying too much to Captain Tracy.

"In spite of the unfavorable impression that you've given me this morning—" the partners exchanged glances like venomed darts—"I'm still inclined to believe in you. You know what I want, I think—proof that will free Mr. Adams from this horrible charge of murder."

"We can't promise, that, Miss Decker."

"But I thought——"

"We can't promise anything except that we'll do our level best to discover who killed Henry Barlow, and produce evidence that will send him to the gallows."

"But I want you to save Fred!"

"If that won't save Mr. Adams, it will be because he's guilty. That's our only chance, Miss Decker—to offer the murderer in exchange for Mr. Adams."

"But you do believe he's innocent?"

"We do!" they chorused, and Hart nodded. "But we can't prove it—yet."

"But you will?"

"If it's humanly possible," said Hart.

"No 'ifs' about it!" growled Yarrow, touched on his professional pride.

"You understand, Miss Decker," insisted Hart, "that you will be employing us to discover the murderer, whoever he may be?"

"Why, yes," answered Ann, vaguely alarmed by his serious air.

"And that you won't interfere?"

"You mean—if the evidence pointed to—me, or—any one else I cared for—I couldn't stop you?"

"Exactly!"

Ann was staring at him with dilated eyes, and without a particle of color in her face.

"You couldn't warn me—and drop the case?"

Hart exchanged glances with Yarrow before he answered.

"Miss Decker, we've already followed this case enough to have some pretty definite ideas concerning who is not guilty. Supposing that it appeared to us that the evidence pointed in certain directions, do you suppose that we should have come to you?"

"No," answered Ann, after she had pondered a moment.

"Then aren't you willing to take a chance with us that we're on the right track?"

"I do! I will! What do you want me to do?"

"Our terms, Miss Decker——"

"Bother that! How much will it all amount to?"

Hart named a figure that rather staggered Ann.

"Why," she said slowly, when she had figured for a moment, "you're asking a small fortune! But I'm going to do it,"

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she added, speaking as if in answer to an inner protest. "I'm going to do it. I must know the truth—at any price."

Hart produced a typewritten paper and uncapped his fountain-pen.

"If you'll kindly sign this agreement, Miss Decker, we'll take official charge of the case at once."

Somewhat nervously, Ann read the agreement. It seemed, and in fact was, a simple agreement in which Yarrow & Hart undertook, within sixty days, to discover the murderer of Henry Barlow, and secure evidence tending to convict him; while Ann agreed to allow the partners free rein in their investigations, to defray their current expenses, and to pay them a generous bonus in addition, if they were successful.

With a silent prayer that she might be doing the right thing, Ann signed the agreement, made out a check for one week's expenses in advance, and gave them over to Hart.

"Now," she cried eagerly, "tell me exactly what you've already done in the case!"

Hart shook his head in grave rebuke.

"You must trust us, Miss Decker."

"I do trust you! But you must give me some comfort, some hope!"

"She's right," growled Yarrow. "It won't do any harm to ease her mind a bit."

"You'll promise not to repeat to any one what we tell you, or even hint that we have told you anything?" demanded Hart.

"Yes! Yes! I'll promise."

"Very well," said Hart reluctantly. "We're convinced, Miss Decker, that Mr. Adams is quite innocent of the murder of his cousin; but we're not prepared as yet to convince a jury. Ordinarily we work from investigation to analysis; but in this instance we have reversed the process. The case, so far as Mr. Adams is concerned, is too simple to make our usual method necessary."

"Then, if I understand you," said Ann with evident disappointment, "you don't really know any more about it than I do."

"We have a number of clues," the analyst hastened to assure her, "some of which are really very promising."

"Just what do you mean by clues?"

"I prefer not to answer that question."

"What if I should insist?"

"I should refer you to your agreement and decline to answer."

"Really," said Ann, with a gesture of impatience, "I don't see why you bound me to secrecy, when you don't intend to tell me anything."

"We want you to tell us some things," answered Hart, deftly switching the conversation. "You'll be frank with us, Miss Decker?"

"I'll give you my word, Mr. Hart. I intend to be perfectly honest with you, if you won't with me."

"A very proper spirit, I'm sure," returned Hart, no whit embarrassed by the rebuke. "Now——"

"Excuse me, Hart," interrupted Yarrow, "but this is my part of the business."

"Oh, very well," agreed the analyst. "I assume Miss Decker will answer you as readily as she would me."

"Quite as readily," assented the girl, with a demure smile.

THE investigator hitched his chair into a more commanding position, and put his questions briskly, yet with a certain deferential gentleness. And it was noticeable that, insofar as his absorption permitted, he endeavored to suit his language to his client.

"Your father continued to handle his business affairs in spite of his—trouble?"

"Absolutely!"

"Under the circumstances, don't you think that was foolish?"

Yarrow had kindly tried to find a softer word, but his vocabulary was too limited. Ann resented the suggestion, however, not its expression.

"Can't you understand, Mr. Yarrow?" she cried hotly. "In order to take charge of father's affairs, I should have to have him declared incapable of handling them himself, and I couldn't do that! I won't do it!"

The investigator nodded sympathetically, but continued his probing.

"Where were you the night of the murder?"

"In my room."

"When did you leave it?"

"Between seven and eight the next morning, when I went in as usual to see how father had passed the night."

"Did you hear or see anything at all out of the ordinary?"

"Not a thing. It seems to me," she added, with an impatient little laugh, "that you're wasting time with me. I told all I knew at the inquest."

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"Your testimony was interrupted, you'll remember," said Yarrow curtly. "What do you know about Welding?"

"Why—everything necessary, I suppose. Surely you don't suspect him?"

"I'm merely looking for facts. Did you tell Welding you were going to put us on the case?"

"I told him I'd practically decided to do so."

"When was that?"

"Yesterday afternoon."

"What did he say?"

"He advised against it, as he did when Mr. Hart first came to me."

"Just what all do you know about Welding? Who is he? Where did he come from? What's his business in Chicago? What's his standing in your family?"

"I've known Mr. Welding for something over a year—about a year ago this Spring, to be as exact as I can. Father and I were out riding one afternoon, by the doctor's advice. I was driving, naturally. Suddenly the horse bolted and Mr. Welding jumped to his head just in time to save us a bad spill."

"Met him before?"

"No; he was an entire stranger. He was very kind, though, and I invited him to call. He's been coming to see father pretty regularly ever since." Ann's cheeks were flushed a little now, but she went on bravely. "He and father seemed to take an instant liking to one another, and I was very glad; for father has practically no friends, and he's usually suspicious of strangers. Mr. Welding became quite the family friend."

She stopped with that, seeming to think that she had said all that was necessary; but Yarrow was ruthless.

"You didn't suspect that he was coming to see you?"

"Mr. Yarrow!"

"No need to get huffy, Miss Decker. I got to know these things, and I can't ask any one else, can I?"

"No, I didn't suspect," said Ann obediently, though somewhat indignantly, "or I shouldn't have permitted it."

"When did you begin to suspect?"

"A few days ago. But that's no sign," she added defensively, "that he came to see me all along."

"You never had the least suspicion before the murder?"

"No, indeed!"

"Did Adams?"

"I don't see why you should ask me such questions!" cried Ann, now thoroughly indignant.

"I got to know," was the dogged answer. "This was an inside job—done by some one familiar with the place. I got to clear each of them in turn, so I'll know where not to look."

"Excuse me, I didn't understand," said Ann meekly. "Fred pretended to notice something—at least, he was jealous."

"That why you quarreled?"

Ann started to make a sharp retort, then remembered Yarrow's recent explanation and answered brokenly—

"No, but it helped make it worse."

"What was the quarrel about?"

The girl gasped and turned pale.

"That's one thing I'll never tell any one!" she declared with a decision that appeared to make questions useless; yet she saw that Yarrow was by no means daunted, and hastened to forestall him. "No, no, Mr. Yarrow! I won't say a word about that—not a word!"

"Not if a word would set Adams free?" was the grim question.

"No-o," she faltered. "Of course, I would, if it would," she hastened to explain somewhat wildly. "But I know it wouldn't."

"What does Welding do for a living?"

"He's independently wealthy, I believe."

"Where'd he come from?"

"He has no regular home, I understand, if that's what you mean. When he found that we had no mutual friends, he rather went out of his way to prove to us that he was what he represented himself to be—brought letters from his bankers, and from a business man or two."

"His letters are all straight," said Yarrow calmly. "I've had 'em traced. Welding asked you to marry him?"

"Yes-s."

"What made you refuse him?"

"I won't tell you!" she cried indignantly. "I don't see that it has any bearing on your investigations. How did you know I'd refused him?"

"You tell me, and I'll tell you," grinned Yarrow.

Ann blushed most becomingly and took some time to master her confusion.

"I suppose you ought to know," she said at length. "But it must be a secret."

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"Anything you say is safe with us," Hart assured her gravely.

"I—I discovered I still loved Fred," she confessed.

"I thought so!" said Yarrow with quiet satisfaction.

Ann blushed again, but held him to his bargain.

"You were going to tell me——"

"How I knew you told Welding no? It was all in the way you said it. A girl's usually proud to admit it, when she's promised to marry a man; but no decent girl brags about turning down an honest man."

"That was clever, Mr. Yarrow!" cried Ann.

"Thanks. I ain't started yet, though. And wait till you hear Val's adding-machine buzz."

"If Mr. Hart is smarter than you at putting two and two together——"

"He ain't, but he thinks he is. How did Welding take his turn-down? Saying anything about leaving Chicago?"

"Not then. He did mention it earlier."

"Say where he was going?"

"No."

"Ever hear him mention Hope, Arizona?"

"He and father talk about the West a lot, and I've frequently heard them mention Hope; but father won't say much when I'm about."

"You don't know anything about the place, then?"

"I have a vague impression that I was born there."

"You were born right here in Chicago, two years after your father came East," said Hart calmly, then nodded to his partner to resume the questioning.

"Ever hear Barlow speak of Hope?"

"No. If that point is so important——"

"It is!" cried Yarrow eagerly.

"Well, I don't suppose it really amounts to anything, but some time ago I just happened to see a little news item in *The Tribune*, with a Hope date-line. It was a joking little paragraph about an old murder that some one was trying to have investigated. The paper treated it as though it were an annual joke."

"Remember the names?"

"No. I didn't really pay any attention to what it said. I showed it to father, thinking he might be interested; and I was much surprised when he made a great to-do over it."

"Why?"

"He wouldn't tell me anything about it, but he went round all the rest of the day muttering to himself."

"Did he show it to Barlow?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"How long ago was it you found this little news item?"

"Oh, perhaps two years ago."

"Did your father ever write to Hope, or get any word from there?"

"Not that I know of."

"Could he without your knowing it?"

"Certainly! I wouldn't think of interfering with his receiving or sending letters. But so far as I can remember, he hasn't written a letter for over five years."

Yarrow nodded and looked at his partner with a puzzled frown; but Hart grinned reassuringly.

"I feel as though I'd been on trial for my life!" sighed Ann, with a little nervous laugh. "And I'm not quite sure what the verdict's to be."

"You needn't worry," returned Yarrow, with a friendly grin; "and thanks for being honest with us."

"If you'd only tell me just what you're trying to do——"

Hart, rising abruptly, indicated that the interview was at an end.

"We'll let you know just as soon as we know anything definite," he promised. "But, remember, Miss Decker, our agreement calls for a free hand, a still tongue—and no questions."

CHAPTER XIX

INTO THE DARK

"YOU had your nerve, letting Miss Ann think we got nothing on her old man," said Yarrow, as the partners sat smoking in their office. "You'll feel nice, won't you, when you got to show her what Ben found in the clock?"

"That may not be necessary."

"I hope it ain't. I'd hate to be the one to tell her it was her crazy father croaked Barlow."

"Let's not tell her before we have to," suggested the analyst, with a quizzical smile.

"Hey? Ain't you convinced yet?"

Hart shook his head smilingly.

"But look a' here!" cried Yarrow, spreading on the table between them the paper

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that he had been gloating over. "If this ain't proof——"

"It's proof he had the motive," agreed the other, "but that doesn't prove he actually did it."

"Aw ——!" growled Yarrow, tossing the paper aside and filling his black pipe. "What's the good dealing you facts if you chuck 'em in the discard?"

"Jeff," said Hart with sudden seriousness, "do you think we'd be treating Miss Ann right, if we turned up her father as the murderer?"

"We got to, if he is," was the stubborn response.

"If he is—yes. But let's prove it first. Now, don't interrupt! I realize as keenly as you do the importance of this paper. I agree that it makes things look black for Decker. But, unless Slocum's lying to you, I can't see when Decker had the chance."

"Slocum ain't lying," growled Yarrow. "He ain't smart enough to lie to me."

"I believe you. And—" Hart hesitated oddly, and observed his partner sharply—"I don't like the idea of taking Miss Ann's money—to buy the rope to hang her father."

"That's our business!" snapped Yarrow.

"True!" Hart began to smile again. "But you don't like it a bit better than I do."

"I guess I got bowels, too!" was the indignant retort.

"Of course you have. That's why you're going to kick in with me and do your best to prove that Decker's innocent."

Yarrow looked up, startled no less by Hart's earnestness than by the fact that he had dropped into slang and friendliness in one breath.

"By Gosh, Val, now you're talking!" he cried and gripped his partner's hand enthusiastically. "Say! It's going to be some game, hey? Us & Co. agin the world—to save a crazy man and an idiot!"

"That's the game as I see it," laughed Hart. "Jeff, I'm proud of you."

"Aw, cut that iron cross stuff," growled the investigator, trying not to show that he liked it; and he added with a mocking grin, "We get better team-work by t'rowing bricks."

"Heave ahead," invited Hart.

"I'm going to give you a chance for your life," grinned Yarrow. "I was aiming to hold out on you; but I ain't got the heart now. I got hold of Slocum later on and asked him if Decker ever writes letters, or gets any. First off, he says no. Then he give a jump, and says: 'Yes, I do remember one! It must 'a' been all of two years ago, though.'

"He couldn't tell me much—just remembers Decker'd been stewing all evening, holding a gabfast with himself; and then, when Miss Ann was out the way, he sits down at his desk and begins writing. It didn't take him five minutes; and all the time he was cackling like he was laying a bad egg for somebody. He wanted to go right out and mail it himself, but after awhile he let Slocum persuade him he'd mail it first thing in the morning."

"Slocum saw the address, then?"

"Sure thing. It was Hope, Arizona."

"Did he remember the name?"

"Couldn't even make a guess at it."

"Did Decker ever get an answer?"

"Not so far's Slocum knows. Funny part of it was, he didn't seem to expect any."

"Hum," murmured the analyst, with a cautious glance at the paper on the table. "That's good work, Jeff."

"Aw, bricks bring home more bacon!"

"Suppose you see if Ben's willing to stand watch alone for a while. We need you outside."

"Glory be!" sighed Yarrow. "It'll be fine to be hitting the cement again. I never did think mother raised me to be a parlor ornament. Cook'll miss me, though."

"What have you learned—anything?"

"Depends on what you call anything," was the cautious answer. "Postman comes from right, crosses over the street, and goes back Elm Street—they's no houses round the corner either way. Welding comes and goes both ways, depending on whether he's riding or hoofing it. Decker's doctor does the same. Ben went out right once, and came back the same way, but he mostly uses the back gate like the other servants.

"Miss Ann goes and comes right, 'cept when she's riding with Welding; then they come back any old way's nearest when they hit for home. That fool kid Slocum wanders all over the scenery—had me out twice last night, thinking I'd hit on something. A tomcat went left, licking his chops like he'd been taking tea with cook."

"Probably been eating the cuckoo," snarled Hart, exasperated at this sudden

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introduction of levity into a matter so serious.

"Then they was a job lot o' agents, a couple o' fresh reporters trying to scare up pork-and-bean money out of a dead story, and a plain-clothes man, Bristow, from Tracy's bunch o' flatfeet. Every last mother's son of 'em came right and went the same way, usually in a hurry and looking like they'd enjoy changing Ben's map."

"Hum!" muttered the analyst. "They don't bother the Deckers, then?"

"Not so's you'd notice it. Most folks ain't taking chances with a crazy man, if he is kind and house-broke."

"But don't the Deckers have any friends calling on them?"

"Nary a friend—'less you'd call Welding one. Honest, Val, it'd make you sick to think o' that poor girl shut up all the time with her crazy father—alone."

"I do think of it," said Hart briefly. "How'd you like to shadow Welding for a while?"

"You ain't thinking o' hanging it on to him?"

"Why not?"

"I'll lay you any odds he ain't said two words to Barlow in his life."

"I think he had as much motive as some you've been trying to hang. He's Decker's friend—he wants to marry the girl. If he knew Barlow was bleeding them, what's to prevent his proving his friendship by turning off Barlow?"

"Wow!" ejaculated Yarrow in a tense whisper. "Why the devil didn't I think o' that?"

"Because that's my part of the business. Your report shows that those who use the front door of the Cuckoo's Nest naturally turn to the right on leaving. Of them all, Welding's the only one who goes both ways. I want you to find out everything about him you can, in as short a time as possible. Superficially he answers all the requirements, except the motive. It's up to you to find out if he could have had a motive, and what he was doing on the night of the murder. Also, Miss Ann said he spoke about going away. If that's really his intention, I want to know why and where."

"It's a cinch."

"I don't agree with you. You can't get him drunk and pump him as you did Slocum; nor you can't cozen him as you did Ben and the cook. He's close as a clam, when you stop to think of it; and if he finds you're on his heels, look out!"

"Think he'd scrap?" asked Yarrow hopefully.

"I think he would, if he didn't care to turn you over to the police. And it's my opinion you'd find him a handful if he decided to fight."

"I should worry!" chuckled the investigator.

YARROW'S first move was to discover whether he was personally known to Welding. To this end he registered at Welding's hotel, the Harland, under the name of Miles Geoffrey.

For the greater part of the day he constituted himself Welding's shadow—lunched at the next table, read his paper in the adjoining chair in the lobby, rubbed elbows with Welding at the hotel bar, and had his shoes shined in the barber shop while Welding was being shaved. In the course of twelve hourse, he put himself in the way of his quarry a score of times, without arousing any more interest than a city man gives to any stranger who occasionally crosses his path.

Convinced that Welding did not know him by sight, Yarrow boldly accompanied him on the street-car to the Cuckoo's Nest in the afternoon, and visited with Ben and the cook while Welding made an unusually short call next door.

Following dinner, which the two men ate at adjoining tables, they repaired to the hotel lobby for their after-dinner smoke. Welding smoked his cigar in leisurely fashion, yawned over the sporting editions, and then went to the rack of railroad folders, selected several with care, and returned to his seat where he began a somewhat indifferent study of time-tables.

This consulting of time-tables was baffling to Yarrow. The big type on the outside of the folders told little, for the roads represented ran both east and west from Chicago. He could not, moreover, disregard the fact that Welding had made no attempt to conceal what he was doing; whereas, if he had so desired, he could easily have procured the time-tables without taking them from a rack in a public lounging-room. On the other hand, the fact that his possible destination was so difficult to guess showed either that Welding had not yet made up his mind, or that he was purposely trying

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to cloud his intentions. When finally Welding went up to his room, taking the folders with him for further study, he left the investigator in a state of indignant irritation.

As soon as Yarrow was satisfied that Welding had retired for the night, he went scowling to the desk and asked to be moved to a quieter room. Without arousing the suspicions of the obliging clerk, he succeeded in getting the room adjoining Welding's apartments, and separated from them only by a doubly bolted door.

The following day Yarrow rather avoided his quarry; and when Welding left the hotel after luncheon, the investigator did not attempt to follow. Instead, he went up to his room, bolted his hall door and hung a towel over the keyhole, drew the bolt on the communicating door, and set to work. The shot bolt on the other side of the door, gave him little trouble. It was Yarrow's boast that, given a reasonable amount of time, and a tool or two, he could "crack" any bolt, lock, or combination ever devised; and he was soon proceeding with his investigation of Welding's apartment.

For two hours he looked into every likely and unlikely place, even removing pictures and ornaments, and testing furniture and woodwork; and found repeated proof that Welding was exactly what he purported to be—an ordinary, comfortably wealthy man, as Ann had described him. The only suspicious fact was the absence of letters of any kind in his suite. Bills there were in plenty—all paid, be it said to the credit of Welding. But apparently Welding made it a practise to destroy all letters as soon as read.

The waste-basket was empty, for the room had already been "done up" for the day; and the railway folders, conspicuously displayed on the center table, were as innocent of clews as when Welding had taken them from the rack.

Since he had found nothing, Yarrow decided that there was nothing to be found, and that was enough for his purpose. The investigator remained in his own room until Welding came up to dress for dinner; but Welding gave no indication of knowing his privacy had been invaded. Therefore, it was a very placid and self-satisfied Yarrow who dined in the vicinity of his quarry and sat down to spend another evening with him in the hotel lobby.

It appeared, however, that Welding had other plans. He had not smoked his first cigar half its length when he yawned, arose, and walked out into the street. Yarrow, hopeful that there might be something doing, followed discreetly.

If Welding had any suspicion that he was being trailed, he disguised it most successfully. He strode along at an easy gait, mounted the steps to the elevated without haste, took the first train that went cityward, and made himself comfortable in the smoking-car, while Yarrow smoked his pipe on the platform.

At Madison Street Welding transferred to a train on the Metropolitan line and headed westward. Yarrow again rode on the platform; and he followed at a safe distance when Welding finally alighted at a station near Douglas Park.

Like all parts of Chicago, this section was well known to Yarrow. It was congested with grimy factories, with the homes of the polyglot factory workers, and with the small shops that served their needs. Yarrow wondered what errand could have brought Welding to this vicinity at this time of night. It was nearing nine o'clock, and, although the saloons and the movies kept many people on the streets, it was late to make a call—unless, indeed, Welding had an appointment.

At least, he appeared to have a definite objective, for he strode along with his former careless gait, neither quickening his step nor trying to lose himself in the crowds; while the investigator sauntered after, too elusive to be caught even if he had been suspected. In the middle of the second block Welding turned into a little tobacco shop without in the least attempting to conceal his intention.

This left the investigator in a quandary. He knew that the tobacco shop had a back outlet—there was an alley in the rear of the row of shops—yet he did not care to give Welding cause for suspicion by following him into the store, or even by watching him through the show window. Quickly deciding that this was no time for him to force matters, Yarrow dodged into the shadow of a sidewalk sign that would hide him from any except the most prying eyes.

He had hardly satisfied himself of the security of his retreat, when Welding reappeared. The man stopped just outside the door for a moment, while he settled a small

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package in his side pocket and looked carelessly about him, as if undecided which way to go; then, giving his pocket a satisfied pat, he started back the way he had come.

It was too late for Yarrow to retreat. Indeed, a temporary gap in the thinning crowd had left the street behind him practically deserted. And the shadow to which he had trusted was not deep enough to hide him securely from one passing his covert. The best he could do was to simulate an absorbing interest in the window before him and hold himself ready for whatever might develop.

And that was—nothing. Welding went his way in utter unconcern, swinging his stick in tranquil time to a little tune he whistled between his teeth, and leaving the investigator up against it to decide whether the one glance given him in passing had been prompted by suspicion or idle curiosity. In any event, he had no motive for continuing his shadowing, since it seemed logical to suppose that Welding had made the long trip to the West Side for the sole purpose of visiting the little tobacco shop. If the place was worth the trip to Welding, it was equally deserving of the attention of the investigator. And as soon as he considered it safe to leave his protecting shadow, Yarrow proceeded to the shop.

It was a cozy little place, well stocked and well kept. The proprietor—or, at least, the present occupant—was a motherly old woman who looked up from her knitting to nod him a smiling welcome.

"You got some nice-looking pipes in the window," said Yarrow. "Mind if I paw 'em over?"

"That's what they're there for," she smiled, and fetched the tray from the window.

With a calabash in one hand and a brier in the other, the investigator let his eyes wander absently over the premises, as if he were mentally weighing the respective merits of the two pipes. He noted the boxes of clean laundry neatly stacked on the lower shelves; the neat array of unopened mail just out of reach behind the counter; the neatly lettered list of rooms to let; the neat case of books for rent. "Beat" was the only possible word to describe the contents of the shop; and he knew that he had come to the right place for information, if only he could win the woman's confidence.

"I dunno," he mused; then he let his eyes fall upon the letters, and asked abruptly, "Could I have my mail sent here for a few days?"

"Why—yes, I s'pose so," was the hesitating answer. "We don't make a business of it."

"I'm looking for work—heard they was short of hands in some o' the shops," explained Yarrow. "Might want to rent a room, too, if I have any luck. Meanwhile, I'd like some place in the neighborhood where I could tell my old mother to send her letters. They's only me, you know."

"That's all right," said the woman quickly. "I got a boy of my own. He don't write as often as I'd like."

"It's a shame how a fellow forgets," commiserated Yarrow. "My name's Geoffrey," he added, "Miles Geoffrey. If anything comes for me, I'd be much obliged if you'd hold it for a few days."

"We'll hold it," was the ready answer. "Don't worry about that. There was a man in here just now hadn't called for his mail in two weeks—but it was right here when he came."

Yarrow saw the chance for which he had been hoping, and ventured everything on one question.

"Was his name Welding?" And as the woman shook her head, with a queer look at him, he hurried on, "I thought I saw a friend o' that name going out just ahead of me."

"I've never taken in letters for anybody named Welding," said the mistress of the shop, collecting the scattered pipes as if she doubted Yarrow's interest in them.

"Just a minute!" pleaded Yarrow. "I ain't quite made up my mind. Mother always said the styles changed while I was picking out a hat!"

The woman thawed noticeably at this proof that Yarrow's mother was constantly in his thoughts, and the investigator put what he feared would be his last question.

"Would you mind, ma'am, if I asked you what that man's name was?"

The woman placed both plump hands on the counter and leaned forward to study her inquisitive customer. Yarrow veiled his keen eyes with an ingratiating smile and bore her suspicious stare with no sign of uneasiness.

"You a detective?" she snapped.

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"My Lord! No!" exclaimed Yarrow with a startled laugh.

"Then you got no business poking your nose into my customers' affairs!" retorted the woman, tumbling the pipes into the tray with an angry clatter.

For a moment Yarrow was tempted to flash his shield and declare his business; but on second thought he decided that he would do better to stick to his original rôle.

"'Scuse me, ma'am!" he apologized. "I didn't aim to butt in; but the Welding I'm asking about had a run-in with the cops in a strike down East, and I heard he'd changed his name."

The woman surveyed him with patent distrust, shrugged her shoulders, and opened her mouth to voice her final refusal to give information. Yarrow knew that from her attitude; but the entrance of another customer caused her to change her speech to a business-like—

"That brier's a dollar and a quarter, mister."

"I'll take it," said Yarrow, more for the benefit of the other customer than because he wanted the pipe; and he offered in payment a five-dollar bank-note.

The woman nodded curtly and examined the bill with covert suspicion. But finally she dropped it into the till and counted out Yarrow's change.

"Thank you!" she murmured, from force of habit; then turned smilingly to the waiting customer.

Concealing his chagrin by simulating interest in his purchase, Yarrow sauntered toward the door.

"Good night, ma'am!" he called over his shoulder. "I'll be round for mail in a day or two."

But mentally he was wailing:

"Stung! Who'd 'a' thought a woman could hold her tongue like that? And all I wanted was one measly little word!"

Back on the street, he hesitated. Most ardently he longed to trail Welding, get him alone in a favorable spot, and hold him up for the all-important letters that he was carrying; for Yarrow was now convinced that the package which he had seen Welding pocketing, outside the tobacco shop, comprised his two weeks' mail. But that satisfaction was denied him. Welding might be half-way back to the hotel, for all Yarrow knew; nor had the investigator any idea where else to look for his escaped quarry.

What, then, should the disgusted investigator do: call it a day's work and report to Hart his one bit of news, or renew his acquaintance with the neighborhood? The remembrance of the back outlet to the shop decided him, and he followed the direction in which Welding had disappeared. In view of his unsatisfactory experience at the tobacco shop, he should probably never return to the locality on the same errand; but he might just as well make sure of that alley, while he was there.

Like too many of Chicago's alleys, this one was rutted deep with the passage of heavy trucks and strewn with débris that could be smelled though it could not be seen. For the alley was without light of any kind, except such misleading rays as filtered from the buildings that backed upon it.

Yarrow stumbled along, more intent upon counting his steps than upon watching where he was putting his feet, for he had carefully paced off the distance from the shop to the corner. He had counted one-third the necessary paces when he thought he heard something behind him. He turned and dodged with the same motion, and saw the figure of a man close at his heels.

Yarrow seldom shirked a fight. Ordinarily he was ready to meet trouble more than half-way; but this was one occasion when he instantly decided to run from it. He could not guess at the identity of his opponent, nor imagine any reason, except robbery, for which he should be attacked. And he had no mind to risk being incapacitated through mere love of a scrap, just when the Barlow case was getting interesting.

So, realizing that his shortest route to safety was cut off, Yarrow whirled about, took a long stride forward—and stepped off into the dark.

CHAPTER XX

THE WILL

WITH obvious reluctance, Adams advanced to the front of his cell and took the hand that Attorney Bertram offered in greeting.

Close confinement had already given the prisoner's skin a touch of the prison pallor; and his eyes, though they had none of the furtive look of the convict, were dull and weary from brooding and lack of sleep.

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But his chin was up, his shoulders were squared, and his whole manner showed him still capable of fighting to the bitter end the campaign of silent endurance which he had laid out for himself. In contrast, the old lawyer was in such a state of nervous excitement that he mumbled and grimaced like a man in his dotage.

"What's up?" demanded Adams. "I told you I wanted to be alone."

"I know! I know! But I had to see you!" Bertram glanced behind to see that the guard was out of hearing, and sank his voice to a whisper. "The will! They've found the will—your cousin's last will and testament—made not two days before he died!"

"I rather thought they would," was the calm response.

"Do you know what it says?"

"From your actions I should judge Cousin Henry left me a noose and a beam to hang from."

"It wouldn't be much more serious if he had," snapped Bertram, who was gaining his self-control from the coolness of his client. "He leaves everything to you, Adams—everything. They've really got something on you now, my boy."

"The police found it, then?"

"Tracy himself—slipped into a sort of a false bottom in the drawer of your cousin's big table."

"Good for Tracy! He has more brains than I gave him credit for."

"He received a letter—an anonymous letter—telling him just where to look."

"You're sure of that?"

"I saw the letter. It looks like a disguised hand."

"Then Cousin Henry couldn't have written it?"

"Nonsense!"

"All right!" Adams laughed bitterly. "But you'd better have his grave examined. That's just the kind of a trick he'd enjoy."

"I think I should try to speak respectfully of a dead man, whatever he'd been, if he'd left me a million or so."

"That isn't a circumstance to some of the other things Cousin Henry did for me," was the stubborn answer. "I never did believe in ghosts. I don't yet; but I'm beginning to believe there's more than one way for the dead to haunt the living."

"I wouldn't advise you to let it be known that you're haunted," was the severe reply. "It savors too much of a guilty conscience."

The prisoner laughed harshly, then peered keenly through the bars.

"Why, Bertram! I do believe you're beginning to lose faith in me.

"I'm afraid I am," admitted the lawyer. "This has been a terrible shock to me, my boy. I never knew such a will had been drawn until I saw it today. It is holographic—written out in Barlow's own hand. I've often urged such a disposition of the estate; but I thanked God that no such instrument was found when you were laid under suspicion. Now the police have the case completed for them."

"Will a holographic will stand in law?"

"This one will. It's properly drawn up and witnessed."

"Who witnessed it?"

"Ben and the cook."

"Then why the deuce didn't they say something about it?"

"They didn't know what it was. They were frequently called in to witness Mr. Barlow's signature—you know that. So they thought nothing of it at the time."

"Does Ann know?" asked Adams after a brief silence.

"No. I had a hope—a very faint hope—that this would bring you to your senses!" Bertram spoke with a heat that showed how overwrought he was. "Whatever has been keeping you silent——"

"Is just as potent as ever," Adams assured him. "You're wasting every minute you spend arguing with me."

"I'm beginning to think you're as crazy as Decker," muttered the lawyer.

Adams laughed mirthlessly.

"Bertram," he said more kindly, "if I tell you something, will you promise not to breath it to a soul?"

The old man flushed and drew himself up with a stiff dignity.

"Sir, you can tell your lawyer anything without fear of betrayal."

"Of course! Of course! I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, Bertram. But I'm speaking to the man now, not to the lawyer; and I want you to promise, as man to man, not even to hint at this to any one, most of all, to Ann."

Bertram flushed again and moved uneasily as he quickly gave the desired promise. It was obvious that he had made a mental reservation, and that Adams had fairly caught him.

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"Cousin Henry showed me that will—the night he died."

"What?" gasped Bertram, and clutched at the bars for support. "You knew it all the time?"

Adams nodded.

"It was during our quarrel, that last night. Cousin Henry wanted me to do something. Oh, you needn't prick up your ears, for I'm not going to tell you what it was. I refused, as any one would under the circumstances, and he flashed this will on me to show me what I'd lose by refusing."

"Well?"

"I laughed at him and told him to go to the devil."

"Was that when he offered you that check?" was the hesitating question.

"Yes. You know what I did with that."

"He threatened to destroy this will, of course, if you didn't do as he asked? But why didn't he destroy it? You have a theory, I see?"

"Yes. Though I'll admit it's only a guess. I can't make anything else out of it but that the murderer came in before Cousin Henry had a chance to destroy the will, and that the murderer hid it—though I can't guess why. But won't a jury believe that I had planned to conceal the will for a short time, till things blew over a bit?"

"Undoubtedly," sighed Bertram. "Have you any idea how that will came to be found at this particular time?"

"Why don't you ask me if I knew where the will was hidden?"

"Did you?" demanded Bertram, though he betrayed his shame as he put the question.

"No—word of honor! The will was lying on Cousin Henry's table when I left him; and I haven't the least idea what happened to it after that."

"Yet you had every opportunity to hide it."

"What?" growled Adams, evidently more astounded than angered.

"According to Tracy, you collected the scattered papers for him the morning they found the body."

"But I couldn't have got the will into its hiding-place without disturbing the body. By Jove! Neither could any one else! Bertram, that will has been put there since the inquest—probably by the very man who wrote to Tracy where to find it."

The lawyer started; then, after a moment of silent thought, slowly shook his head.

"That's very dramatic, Adams. I wish I could think so, but it's too improbable. Why should any one but Mr. Barlow, or you, have any reason for concealing such a will?"

"I don't know," admitted Adams dazedly.

The lawyer nodded slowly.

"Adams, there are only two possible explanations for your continued obstinacy in this matter: either you are yourself guilty, which I'm at times almost forced to believe by your own evidence; or else you're trying to shield some one whom you believe to be guilty."

"Well?" was the defiant question.

"It's wrong, my dear boy, all wrong. There were extenuating circumstances connected with the murder of my late client that might have excused almost any one but you, on the score of extreme provocation. But you have been prosecutor, judge, and jury all in one, and have brought yourself in guilty—for what? Undoubtedly to save some one who was in no need of saving."

"If that's the case," sneered Adams, "why doesn't he come forward and confess?"

"Why should he?" shrugged the lawyer. "He might very well have shared your fear that his case was not as strong as it appeared to him. And now that this will has been found, he has less reason than ever to confess; for you're convicted out of your own mouth! You swore that your cousin's will left everything to charity; and this will, making you the sole heir, supplies the most damnable motive for your killing him."

The old lawyer hid his face in his hands, not because he was ashamed of his emotion but because he felt that he must control himself if he was to accomplish anything with his stubborn client.

"Oh, my boy! My boy!" he sobbed. "Can't you see how wrong—how criminally wrong—you are, to shield this murderer at the risk of your own life? What assurance have you that he won't consider himself immune and commit more and bolder crimes?"

"Nonsense!" retorted Adams with a cynical smile.

"Miss Ann doesn't think it's nonsense. She's worrying herself sick for fear the murderer had a similar grudge against her father."

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"Ann?"

"Why not? Apparently Barlow was murdered in revenge for some past wrong, and he and Decker——"

Adams interrupted with a burst of discordant laughter that chilled the old lawyer to the heart.

"Oh, that's rich! That's rich!" gasped the prisoner, clinging weakly to the bars. "Why, Decker's in no more danger than she is herself." He started at his own words, and his laughter died in his throat. "My God!" he muttered, staring at Bertram with eyes full of horror. "My God! I never thought of that!"

The old lawyer suddenly gasped and gurgled as if he were choking. Then he shook his damp handkerchief in the prisoner's face and shouted:

"My God! Adams, I believe you're shielding——"

"Stop!" cried Adams, smashing his fist against the bars. "We'll have no names, if you please, Bertram; and keep your voice down. The guard is undoubtedly a lookout for Tracy."

For a long moment the two men gazed at one another, and when finally Adams spoke his voice was not altogether steady.

"Bertram, I don't want you to get the idea that I believe in personal vengeance, for I don't. But if ever murder was justified, it was in the case of Henry Barlow."

"That's not for you to say."

"It is—in this instance. You'd say the same, if you knew what I know."

"And does your secret knowledge convince you that you're not shielding the murderer at the expense of Decker—or Ann?" demanded the other.

"They're in no danger. It's impossible, I tell you!" retorted Adams, but his manner satisfied neither his auditor nor himself.

"Perhaps you'd like to have me assure Miss Ann of that?" persisted the lawyer.

"Tell her she's in no danger—but to be careful," was the enigmatic response. And Adams, whose nerves had reached their limit of endurance, threw himself on his cot and turned his face to the wall as a sign that the interview was ended.

TO BERTRAM'S surprise and dismay, the finding of the will troubled Ann even more deeply than he had feared. She realized, without any suggestion from him, what this additional evidence must mean to Adams; and she seemed to feel that now hope itself was dead.

"I loved him so!" she sobbed. "Oh, Mr. Bertram, I loved him so!"

And Bertram noted, with a shudder, that she used the past tense, as if her lover had already suffered the death that he seemed to court.

"I love him, too, Ann," said the lawyer brokenly, as he patted her shoulder with fatherly tenderness. "And I'm not going to give him up yet."

"You're going to do something?" demanded Ann with pathetic fierceness.

"I—I can't, Ann. My hands are tied. But you love him. Why couldn't you do something?"

"I have," admitted Ann, and told him, heedless of her pledge to Yarrow & Hart.

Bertram pursed his lips and dubiously shook his head.

"I wish you had chosen a more reputable firm. I'm afraid Yarrow & Hart are mere cheap shysters."

"They believe in him!" she cried despairingly. "That ought to count for something."

"Well, we'll hope it will make up for other things."

"You'd advise me to call in some one else, then?"

"Seriously, I would."

"I—I can't. I signed a paper."

"Pooh!" Bertram expelled in a scornful breath his professional contempt for legal documents drawn by other men. "I never yet saw a paper I couldn't find flaws in. Let me see it."

"Mr. Hart kept it."

"Haven't you a copy?"

"No. He didn't offer me one, and I didn't think it was necessary."

"Humph! Now I know they're shysters. Just leave them to me, Ann. If you want to put another firm on the case——"

"I—I don't believe I do," murmured Ann. "Somehow I can't help believing in Yarrow & Hart."

CHAPTER XXI

ADAMS TALKS

"HEY, ADAMS! Wake up! Visitor for you!" bawled the guard.

"Tell him to go to the devil!" growled Adams, turning restlessly on his cot.

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But the visitor calmly announced himself—

"It's Hart, Mr. Adams—analyst of the firm of Yarrow & Hart."

"Oh, the detective!" sneered the prisoner. "Why can't you fellows call a spade a spade?"

"It's immaterial," answered Hart imperturbably. "Shall I trouble you if I ask you a few questions?"

"Go ahead, only don't talk too loud, for I'm trying to take a nap."

Adams turned his back on his visitor and stretched himself comfortably on his cot. Hart smiled indulgently and metaphorically tossed a bomb under the prisoner's couch.

"When we were commissioned to investigate the Barlow murder, in your interests——"

Adams whirled round into a sitting position with a suddenness that wrapped his legs in the gray blanket as in a shroud.

"What?" he cried angrily. "What the deuce are you talking about?"

"You heard me plainly enough," was the quiet answer.

"O Bill!" called Adams, trying to attract the attention of the guard. "Take this man away!"

"It's no good carrying on like that, Mr. Adams," the analyst assured him with a sweet smile. "I brought Bill a nice little pair of ear-muffs, and he's wearing them at this minute."

Baffled and vaguely alarmed, Adams sat silently studying the matter, while he absently wrapped and unwrapped his blanket-shrouded legs. Finally he looked up with an expression so grim that it would have disheartened a man of less assurance than Hart possessed.

"See here, Hart, if you're telling the truth, you must understand that I won't tolerate any interference. But if you're only bluffing—as I believe you are—thinking you can bleed me for expenses——"

"Our expenses are guaranteed."

"But I won't have it!" cried the badgered prisoner, rising and trying to walk off his rising temper. "I tell you, I won't have any one interfering."

"My dear sir, you would have considerable difficulty in convincing any unprejudiced person that we were interfering by trying to free you from a most unjust and absurd accusation."

Adams stopped short and wonderingly surveyed his unwelcome caller.

"Do you mean to tell me," he said slowly, "that you really believe I'm innocent?"

"I do," was the prompt response. "What's more to the point, we expect to prove it to the satisfaction of any jury that can be impaneled by the sovereign State of Illinois."

"If I thought you could do that," said Adams with a fierce intensity, "I'd move heaven and earth to stop you!"

"Not if we cleared Decker at the same time?"

"What?" gasped Adams, sinking back on his cot. "My God! If I could only believe you!"

"We're commissioned to discover and bring to punishment the murderer of Henry Barlow, regardless of who he may be. So when I say we expect to clear both you and Decker, we must have a strong case against some one else."

"You'll get no help from me, Hart—remember that."

"Listen to me for a minute, Mr. Adams. Let's say, for the sake of argument, that I was able to convict either you or Mr. Decker, according to the way I shaped the evidence. I'd choose Decker, of course, because in his condition he'd get off much easier than you would."

"That's enough!" snapped Adams. "Now you get out."

"I've only just begun," was the imperturbable answer. "Do be sensible, Mr. Adams, and listen to me for a minute. Mr. Decker has established an alibi. But supposing he was convicted of the murder—what then? He'd only be placed in confinement."

"You cold-blooded devil," whispered Adams hoarsely. "If you'd ever been cooped up here, like a mad dog——"

"You're letting yourself be cooped up for nothing, Mr. Adams," persisted the analyst. "Nobody but you believes Mr. Decker guilty."

"How do you know I do?"

"You wouldn't be here, otherwise. I know you're both innocent."

"Go ahead and prove it!"

"I'm not sure that I can, without your help."

Adams hesitated for a moment, then shook his head doggedly.

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"It's only a trick to get me to talk," he said resentfully.

"If you realized what a load you'd take off Miss Decker's mind——"

Adams started, then stuck his tongue in his cheek and winked derisively.

"So that's where you're getting your money?" he jeered.

Hart coughed nervously behind his hand and shifted his weight from one foot to the other, like a man about to perform a necessary but most distasteful duty.

"Mr. Adams, has it never occurred to you that, in taking this attitude, you're risking—more than your life?"

"Isn't that enough?" sneered Adams.

"Your engagement to Miss Decker——"

"Stop!" interrupted the prisoner hoarsely. "You'd better drop that subject, Hart!"

"Then you've heard of her intimacy with Mr. Welding?"

That Adams had not heard was shown by his gasping start, but his first thought was to defend Ann's reputation.

"You cur!" he cried, and lunged at the bulky figure of his tormentor.

Hart backed hastily out of reach and put up his hand in protest. "Now, now, Mr. Adams!" he pleaded reprovingly. "I was only trying to do you a kindness."

"You wait till I get out of here!" growled Adams, glaring through the bars like a caged wolf.

"It's only natural," persisted the other, "with you shut up here——"

Adams swung about, caught up a heavy metalware basin, and turned the improvised missile sidewise so that he could swing it through the bars.

"Get out!" he snarled. "Or I'll give them something to hang me for."

Hart shook his head a trifle impatiently.

"Very well, Mr. Adams, I'll go at once, if you'll answer one question for me."

"What's the question?" demanded Adams still swinging the basin with murderous intent.

"Did you ever hear of a man named Campbell, who was murdered in Hope, Arizona, twenty years ago?"

The prisoner stayed his hand, stared, and slowly turned his back while he replaced the basin.

"Campbell—murdered in Arizona?" he repeated as if groping in his memory. "I don't believe I can give you any information about him."

"Thanks. That's what I expected you to say. I hope to have good news for you soon, Mr. Adams. Good day."

And Hart went at once, as he had promised, leaving behind him a very much puzzled man.

IT WAS an angry and determined Adams who confronted Ann and Bertram an hour later in answer to his imperative demand for an interview.

"Call off those fool detectives at once!" he commanded, including his two visitors impartially in his angry glance. "I told you I wouldn't stand for that, and I mean it."

"It was Miss Ann's idea," said Bertram weakly.

"I don't care whose idea it was. I want them stopped—at once!"

"But I can't, Fred," pleaded the girl. "I signed a paper."

"Bertram can get you out of that," retorted Adams with a malicious glance at the old lawyer. "It's more in his line than getting innocent men out of jail."

"I'm afraid I can't," began Bertram uneasily.

"Buy them off, then," ordered Adams with withering scorn.

"I won't!" replied Ann with spirit. "If I just sat still and did nothing, I'd feel like a murderer."

She bit her lip in panicky confusion as the fateful word slipped from her tongue; but Adams only grinned callously at her.

"It seems to me you're acting very selfishly, Adams," interjected Bertram somewhat tartly. "With the murderer at large, Miss Ann has some reason to fear for her father's safety."

"Oh, no!" interrupted the girl, with an alarmed glance at Adams; then she added hastily: "That is—of course I can't help worrying, some. But that's not my chief worry."

"But what about your own safety," retorted the old lawyer, "if the murderer hasn't satisfied his grudge?"

"Oh!" gasped Ann, shrinking away from him.

"How's your father?" was Adams's sharp question.

"Better, much better!" she protested almost tearfully.

Bertram muttered his agreement, but showed himself unsatisfied. Adams turned uncertainly to the girl.

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"Ann, if you're afraid——"

"Of my own father?" she interrupted indignantly.

"No, certainly not!" he returned quickly. "But if you're afraid for him, or yourself, you can easily have the place guarded, without hunting Cousin Henry's murderer."

"Mr. Hart says it amounts to the same thing," she argued.

"Very well," he said coolly. "If you insist on retaining Hart, you'll force me to plead guilty. And I don't think I should have hard work convincing the jury that I am telling the truth."

"Perhaps Mr. Adams would feel differently, if he understood," suggested Bertram, while Ann gasped in speechless horror; and the old lawyer deliberately turned his back and walked down the corridor to hold the attention of the guard.

The girl flushed but snatched eagerly at the chance to break down Adams's obstinacy.

"I—I'm sorry I quarreled with you, Fred," she began in a half whisper.

Adams stared at her, then laughed softly.

"Save your fibs, Ann!" he advised dryly. "It's too late to delude me that way."

"You don't believe me?" she cried with indignant wonder.

Adams shook his head in smiling contempt.

"Hardly. I suppose you mean to be kind, Ann, but you make a most transparent hypocrite."

"It's true!" she insisted, heedless of her own painful confusion.

"You can't expect me to have much faith in your protestations," retorted Adams. "The gossip about you and Welding——"

"You've heard that?" she murmured brokenly.

Adams answered with a curt nod, as if unwilling to accord her the comfort of a word.

"But I've sent him away!" she cried triumphantly.

"That only goes to prove what I've heard," he replied. "It wasn't kind of you, Ann, to let him take my place so soon."

"He hasn't taken your place," she sobbed. "Nobody could do that."

"Anybody's welcome to, that wants it," said Adams, surveying his narrow cell with a humorous grimace.

Obviously his words had a double meaning; and the intimation was not lost upon Ann. She choked down her tears and faced him with rising anger, but Adams gave her no chance to speak.

"Now listen to me, Ann," he said firmly. "We're going to settle this matter once for all. You know as well as I do why I don't want this murder investigated by anybody. "You'd be dragged into it the first thing. And if you told the truth——"

"You know I wouldn't do that," eagerly interrupted the girl; "that is, if it was going to hurt you."

"I'm sure of that, Ann, but you're not a good liar. And if they caught you lying to save me——"

"But aren't *you* lying to save *me?*" she whispered.

"In a sense—yes," admitted Adams, before he had recovered from his confusion at her quick detection of the weak point in his argument.

She slipped her hand through the bars and laid it on his arm. "I am sorry, Fred."

Quickly, but not ungently, the prisoner stepped back out of her reach. He surveyed her silently for a moment, while the muscles of his throat twitched spasmodically. So far as he could determine in the half light of the jail, she was not pining away for him. Her cheeks were paler than usual, her voice was more tremulous; but these signs of distress might be partly assumed, to strengthen her attempt to appeal to his love for her. Adams shook his head in half resentful rebuke.

"It's good of you, Ann," he said colorlessly, "but the kindest thing you can do for me now is to call off your detectives and let me take my medicine in my own way."

Something in his tone, rather than in his words themselves, caused her to clutch at the bars that separated them and stare at him with slowly whitening face. And something in his eyes—for he neither moved nor spoke—must have answered her unspoken question.

"You—you *didn't!*" she gasped.

"Then who did?" he answered quietly.

With his words, he sprang forward, for Ann had reeled against the cell front, half fainting. But there was no remorse in his face as he supported her quivering figure and summoned Bertram to her aid.

"Get her out of here," he ordered shortly. "And don't let her come again—no matter

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if I do send for her. But come back. I've something to tell you."

In due time, Bertram reappeared before the cell, with the information that Ann was safe at home and apparently mistress of herself again.

"But you gave her an awful shock," concluded the lawyer. "What in the world did you tell her?"

"I as good as admitted that I killed my cousin."

"My God! No wonder the poor girl fainted. But why——"

"It seemed to be the only way I could persuade her to pay off the detectives," was the impatient answer.

"Logical enough, if you're really guilty," muttered the lawyer.

"Well," sneered Adams, "aren't you almost convinced that I am?"

Bertram shook his head in vigorous negation, but his air did not carry conviction. Adams pulled the lawyer close to the cell front and whispered rapidly in his ear. Almost at the first words, Bertram drew away with a stifled exclamation of horror; but Adams held him fast till his story was finished. The lawyer's drawn face grew more tense as he unwillingly listened; and at the end he reeled and clutched at the bars as Ann had done before him.

"But—I don't believe it!" he gasped.

"Oh yes you do!" retorted the prisoner, grimly smiling. "You can understand my attitude now, can't you? And you'll persuade Ann to stop all investigations at once?"

"I'll do my best. You—you've given me the greatest shock of my life. I wish I knew what to believe!"

"Think it over," advised Adams bitterly. "You ought to find it pleasant food for thought—I have."

CHAPTER XXII

HART INTERVENES

"THERE'S no use prolonging this argument, Miss Decker," said Hart with kindly finality. "We anticipated just such a situation when we asked you to sign this contract. And we shall hold you to it."

"We'll make you earn your money," bristled Bertram, who had worked himself into a state of indignant perspiration at his inability to induce the partners to accept a cash payment and cancel the contract.

Hart bowed to the lawyer with a formality that held a hint of mockery.

"We're already doing that, Mr. Bertram, and we expect to present our bill in forty-eight hours."

"I got a personal interest in bringing in the murderer now," added Yarrow, as he gingerly touched his bandaged head.

"Let me repeat my warning," concluded Hart impressively. "If we brought into court what incomplete evidence we now have, it would go mighty hard with Mr. Decker—mighty hard. But we're both convinced we're hot on the track of the real murderer."

"But if you fail?" cried Ann despairingly.

"Well, suppose we do? Suppose we find we're at the end of the trail, and everything points to your father. What then? According to our contract, we were to produce the murderer; but we might waive that right and hush the whole matter up if you so desired. Shall we, Miss Decker, if we find we're at the end of our resources?"

"I—I don't know," faltered Ann.

"The worst that could happen to your father would be imprisonment for life; but if Mr. Adams were found guilty, they would probably impose the extreme penalty. I believe that Mr. Adams is voluntarily sacrificing himself to protect your father; but are you willing to accept such a sacrifice—even from him?"

"No!" whispered Ann in a choked voice. "No—I can't—I know he hates me now—but I can't see him murdered—not even to save poor father!"

"That's the boy!" muttered Yarrow, winking hard.

Ann appealed to the lawyer.

"What do you think?"

"I still think that Messrs. Yarrow & Hart are rogues and knaves," replied the lawyer in open defiance of the laws pertaining to slander. "But, looking at it from every side, my dear, I should say we might as well let them go ahead—for the present."

"Thanks," said Hart dryly. "We won't fail you, Miss Decker."

"You can bank on that," added Yarrow, vigorously nodding his bandaged head.

"I wish you'd tell me one thing," said Bertram querulously. "Why wasn't that accursed will found before?"

The question was addressed to Hart, but Yarrow gave the answer.

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"Because it wasn't there before," he growled. "We was making things too hot for the murderer, don't you see. And he turned that trick to throw us off."

"If we accept that theory," deduced the lawyer, "we should have to consider the hiding of the will as *prima facie* evidence that Mr. Adams is not the murderer."

"Sure," agreed Yarrow.

"But father," faltered Ann. "He often hides things. Could he——

The investigator shifted his feet and looked away.

"Ask Hart," he muttered. "It's his job rattling the adding machine; all I got to do is bring in the facts."

"That's why I asked for an interview with your father, Miss Decker," said Hart somewhat hastily. "I can't quite decide, otherwise, just how much allowance to make for his condition."

"You'll be wasting your time," said Bertram with a grimace.

Yarrow grimaced, too, and gave his partner a sardonic smile.

"Poor father!" sighed Ann. "But you're welcome to see him if you think it necessary. I'll have Slocum bring him down."

"Thank you. O Yarrow!" And Hart whispered brief instructions in the ear of his partner.

SECRETLY relieved by the knowledge that Yarrow & Hart were still on the job, Ann betook herself to her favorite arbor, where Welding shortly presented himself.

It was not the same Welding who had so often shared her retreat with her. He was as immaculate as ever, but his bronzed face was pale and haggard and his manner showed a nervous restlessness strange in him.

"I'm going away, Ann," he said abruptly.

"I'm sorry," she answered with no show of emotion.

"'Needs must when the devil drives,'" he quoted, with a dry laugh. "In this particular instance, the devil is a serious business tangle that demands my immediate presence."

"I'm sorry," she repeated with more sincerity.

Welding had disregarded her invitation to seat himself; now he took a nervous turn or two upon the greensward, as if to get himself in hand; and Ann, suddenly alert, watched him with some anxiety.

"Ann," he said, abruptly stopping before her, "Ann—I've come to ask you to go with me."

"Go—where?" she stammered, feeling herself helpless before this sudden attack. "I thought you were going on business."

"Business can wait," he replied, with a large gesture. "I'd give every dollar I have in the world, Ann, to take you with me."

"We've already settled that, Mr. Welding," Ann reminded him coldly. "If you'll excuse me——"

She rose to leave; but he put himself in her way and made a desperate effort at self-control.

"Now I've frightened you," he protested, trying to muster an easy smile. "I'm—I'm asking you to marry me, Ann, to let me take you and your father out of this Cuckoo's Nest of suspicion."

"But you know I don't love you. I've already tried to make that plain."

"I don't believe it!" he cried fiercely.

"It's the truth, nevertheless. Good-by, Mr. Welding."

Undaunted by her coldness—rather further inflamed by it, indeed—he snatched at the hand she hesitatingly offered in parting and held her fast.

"Supposing you don't love me now," he pleaded; "at least, you'll go to save your father?"

"To save—my father?" faltered Ann, staring at him with wide eyes.

"You know very well what I mean," insisted Welding, holding her fast. I warned you not to fish in muddied waters, because I knew inquiry into the Barlow case would only arouse suspicion against your father. Yarrow & Hart don't care whom they convict, so long as they get themselves before the public. If you'll only come away, Ann——"

"I don't believe a word you're saying," gasped the girl.

"That's not true!" he retorted. "You've been trying for two days to get them to quit the case. Won't you let me take you both away, Ann, where you'll never have to worry again?"

Ann shook her head vigorously and wrestled silently to free her hand. Angry and frightened though she was, and tempted to call for rescue from this persistent wooer,

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she hoped to avoid the gossip that must follow her being found in such a predicament.

"Not if I told you I could get evidence that would save both your father and Adams?" urged Welding.

"Save them?" she gasped, ceasing her struggles to stare at him. "Save them both? But you couldn't do that! It's only a trick!"

"It's God's truth," he replied so gravely that his words carried conviction in spite of her distrust of him.

"And you will? You'll set Fred free, without bringing suspicion upon my father? You'll give him back?"

"Yes, I'll set him free—and free your father from all suspicion."

But his tone betrayed him, and Ann frowned over his answer.

"If you could do that, why have you kept silent?" she demanded.

"For this! For you! I can prove them both innocent, Ann, but I have my price."

"I'll pay anything!" she cried eagerly.

"My price is—yourself!"

"I thought so!" she whispered. "And you call that—love!"

"Ann!" he pleaded, writhing under the contempt in her eyes.

"I don't love you," she repeated monotonously; "but for their sakes——"

"It's their only chance," he muttered.

"What do you know?" she demanded, suddenly confronting him like a personification of angry justice. "How are you going to bring about this miracle?"

"That's my secret," he retorted with a grim smile.

Ann shook her head impatiently.

"You're unreasonable, Mr. Welding. I don't even know that you *can* do what you promise, and I've no reason to trust you to keep your word."

The man shrugged carelessly, as if he were losing interest in the discussion.

"You'll have to trust me," he answered roughly. "There's no other way."

"There is!" she cried sharply. "I see it now."

But Welding had guessed her thoughts and easily balked her sudden attempt to call for help.

"You're mistaken," he grinned, as he held her tight. "I'll take my secret with me—unless you'll pay. Captain Tracy and all his men couldn't drag it out of me, even if you had them here to help you."

And Ann, knowing the grim strength of his will, realized how vain had been her wild hope of turning him over to the police as a witness, however unwilling. For a sick moment she thought to surrender; then she resumed the struggle to get free, and he held her only by the exertion of his full strength.

"I won't do it!" she panted. "If I could trust you—but I can't! I can't! You—you beast!"

"You'll think differently when it's too late," he sneered, giving voice to his jealous rage. "You'll be glad to give more than I'm asking, when your precious Fred is waiting for the hangman!"

"At least, I'll be there to comfort him!" she retorted; and, drawing back her free hand, she struck him smartly across his snarling mouth.

Welding growled an evil word, then laughed softly.

"You'll pay for that," he whispered. "Oh, believe me, my dear, you'll pay for that."

"But I'll never pay your price!" she cried triumphant in her defiance, despite her helplessness. "I'll marry Fred in spite of you—marry him in the death cell, if it comes to that. That's how much I love him!"

"And I should think that would be enough for any man," rumbled a deep voice behind them.

OAS DECKER entered the living-room for the promised interview with Hart, he suddenly stopped short, stricken motionless with anger and terror.

From the other side of the house, rendered not unmusical by the intervening partition, came the shrill voice of the long-silent cuckoo-clock, striking eleven.

"Sit down, please, Mr. Decker," said the analyst, apparently not observing the other's condition.

Decker turned a blurred glance upon the speaker and motioned eloquently toward the other house; but his parched throat gave forth no sound.

"Oh, that?" said Hart lightly. "It's really the clock you hear this time, not merely your imagination. I told Ben he might as well start it going again."

"Stop it!" gasped Decker.

Hart shook his head and smiled genially upon the terrified man.

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"I rather like it myself," he said. "It sounds sort of homelike and comfortable.'

Decker glared wildly about him, snatched up a heavy bronze ornament from the center table, and started for the hall door. Hart was before him, however, and caught his shoulder in a grip that brought him to an abrupt halt. The captive made as if to resist, then dropped the ornament on the floor and stood rigid, glaring at the partition wall.

"What were you going to do?" asked Hart easily.

"Stop it!" was the hoarse whisper.

"Ben will stop it when I tell him to—not before," was the quiet answer.

In corroboration, the cuckoo again lifted up its voice.

Decker wrenched himself free, thrust his bony fingers into his ears, and slumped rather than fell to the floor. There he groveled in an agony of terror, sobbing out broken curses until the hidden clock had told its tale of passing time.

Not until the last echo of the shrill voice had died away did Hart interfere. Then he knelt beside Decker, pulled his hands down, and spoke firmly but not unkindly.

"Mr. Decker, you can stop that clock forever by answering a few questions for me. Oh, you can do it, all right," he added quickly, as the unfortunate man began to writhe again. "I know you're a sick man, but you can talk sense if you want to. Will you try, if I tell Ben to stop the clock?"

Decker's broken answer merged into curses, as the clock spoke again. It struck but once this time, but that was enough.

"Stop it!" gasped Decker, as Hart again pulled his hands from his ears.

"Will you tell me what I want to know?"

"Anything! Night and day—sleeping and waking——"

Hart stepped into the hall and knocked upon the wall once, then twice. The signal was repeated from the other side, and the ticking of the clock, faintly audible to their straining ears, abruptly stopped.

"There," said Hart with a satisfied glance at the cowering man; "that's the last you'll hear of that—if you'll come through. Let me help you to a chair, Mr. Decker. There! Now I'm going to tell you the story of the original cuckoo-clock. All you've got to do is to check me up on the details."

STARTLED by the rumbling voice behind them, Welding whirled on his heel. In so doing he momentarily relaxed his grip on Ann and the girl jerked free and sprang away to the edge of the little arbor. There she stopped, poised for instant flight, but stayed by an irresistible curiosity.

"Hello! Here's Detective Hart," sneered Welding. "Get out your check book, Ann."

Hart bowed ceremoniously to Ann, as he advanced further into the arbor, but he kept his eyes on the man.

"I came looking for you," he said calmly. "I've just had a most satisfactory interview with Miss Decker's father."

Welding merely stared at the somewhat mysterious announcement; but Ann welcomed it as the opportunity which she had ceased to expect.

"You've been wasting time!" she cried, as she leveled an accusing finger at Welding. "Ask that man what he knows about the Barlow murder!"

"I don't need to ask," replied the analyst with a placid smile. "I've been here for some time, Miss Decker. I overheard Mr. Welding's very generous offer to free both your father and Mr. Adams—for a price. And I shall give him an opportunity to explain."

"Oh!" gasped Ann. "I'm so glad!" And the sob in her voice was eloquent of her relief.

"Stay here, please, Miss Decker," added Hart. "I shall want you for a witness to what Mr. Welding has to say."

"If you were eavesdropping, as you claim," suggested Welding with a taunting smile, "you undoubtedly heard me say that I should carry my secret away with me."

"I did," was the imperturbable response. "But I've known more obstinate men than you to change their minds, when they found it to their advantage."

"In-deed!" drawled Welding, as he drew out his cigaret-case. "Smoke?" he asked politely offering his case before he helped himself.

"No, thank you. You may, though. Tobacco smoke is supposed to soothe the nerves."

Welding lighted his cigaret with steady hands and laughed through the smoke, but he made no answer.

"Mr. Decker talked very frankly of his old life in Arizona," pursued Hart. "And

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he seemed to think that Mr. Welding could give me further information on some points."

"Sorry," replied Welding, "but, as it happens, I'm not acquainted with Arizona."

Hart threw out his hands in a gesture both reproachful and pleading.

"Now, now, Mr. Welding! Your frequent visits to Hope must have made you familiar with the State and some of its queer early history. Don't you recall the story of Kellogg Campbell?"

Welding answered a bit impatiently:

"My few visits were business trips. I've no other interest in Arizona."

"Then you never heard that Mr. Barlow was once tried there for murder?"

Ann gasped; but Welding laughed and tossed his cigaret aside.

"You must have had a most successful interview with Mr. Decker," he sneered lightly, "for he appears to have told you all the wild yarns that he's been regaling me with for the last year. Only I never took them seriously."

"Did he ever mention a most peculiar paper signed by himself and Mr. Barlow?"

"Several times, but I never encouraged him to go into details. I must get him to tell me about it, though. Judging from the impression it made on you, it must be an amazing tale."

"Let me inform you, then, that such a paper actually does exist, that it has been found, and that it gives us the one clew we've lacked—a compelling motive such as was wanting in the case of either Mr. Decker or Mr. Adams."

"Thank God! Oh, thank God!" sobbed Ann.

She felt herself trembling and growing faint; but she was sharply recalled to her senses by Hart's curt order:

"Don't go, Mr. Welding. We shall want you at Mr. Adams's trial as a witness for the defense."

"Then you can subpena me in proper form," laughed the other. "Goodby, Ann. I'll try to see you again before I go."

"You're not going," asserted Hart, and suddenly leaped.

Ordinarily the analyst had no stomach for a fight, and knew from sad experience that his big body held a timorous soul. It must, therefore, have been a desperate necessity that impelled him to attack Welding who was neither weakling nor coward.

In the instant that elapsed between Hart's leap and his landing, Welding had time to take to flight had he been so minded; and it is certain that he could easily have outrun his heavier, slower assailant. But he made no attempt to escape; instead, he crooked his right arm and met the flying analyst with an upward, jolting blow that caught Hart under the chin, rocked him back, and must have downed him but for his weight and the impetus of his rush.

As it was, he landed all asprawl on Welding and bore them both to the ground. Being underneath, Welding got the full shock of the fall; and thus, for the moment, the two combatants were on even terms, both dazed and groggy.

As Welding's breath came back, he struggled and fought to free himself from the very human incubus that held him down; while Hart, recovering more slowly, strove to hold the advantage of his weight and position. So they wrestled for a space, for all the world like two clumsy gladiators, both raging but impotent; and Ann, watching with terror-filled eyes, smothered her screams with her two hands.

Then Welding got his right hand free and began a systematic battering of the big red face above him. He worked at a disadvantage, because he could jab only from the elbow, on account of his position. An opponent more used to fighting could easily have finished him; but Hart, untrained and dizzy, could only burrow his face in the other's shoulder and hang on. But in trying to protect his face he allowed Welding to free his left arm, and that quickly brought the end. Welding sank both hands into the fat red neck, hooked his thumbs around Hart's windpipe, and bore in with all his might.

Ann construed aright the empurpling visage of the analyst, and the convulsive kicking of his legs, and loosed her screams; but it was too late to stay the tide of battle.

Welding relaxed his grip, rolled his inert enemy to one side with a vigorous push, and staggered to his feet. All about him sounded hoarse cries and the crashing of breaking bushes, as men came running to answer Ann's alarm. Ever since the murder, the neighborhood had been infested with the idly curious, as well as with police and reporters; and there was no lack of men within sound of Ann's voice.

Keenly alive though he evidently was to

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his peril, Welding made no uncertain dash to escape. He brushed down his disordered clothing with a sweep of his hand, caught up his hat, and waved it to Ann.

"Goodby!" he called mockingly.

For an instant he gazed down at the insensible form at his feet; then, drawing back his leg to get a full swing, he gave Hart a vicious kick in the ribs.

"You sneaking dog!" he muttered, and was gone.

With his going, men debouched into the little arbor from all sides, breathlessly demanding to know the cause of the outcry. First among them came Yarrow, who reached Ann just as she knelt to loosen Hart's collar.

"Say it was a tramp," he whispered huskily. "Get me? Just a tramp—drunk."

CHAPTER XXIII

MOOT-COURT

FOR the first time since the murder, the shades were down again in the Barlow living-room and the incandescents were blazing brightly.

The chair in which Barlow had died was occupied by Hart. The analyst's face was bruised from his encounter of the afternoon and decorated with several strips of surgeon's plaster. He appeared weak and sick, and should apparently have been in bed, but his interest in the mass of papers before him seemed to keep him up. Beside him lounged Yarrow, with his feet crossed on the corner of the big table, his hands clasped behind his bandaged head, and his black pipe reeking. Before them stood Ben, grinning like the proverbial cat that has eaten the canary.

"Everything ready, Ben?" asked Hart without looking up.

"All O. K. And Mr. Adams?" asked Ben eagerly.

"Mr. Adams will be free in twenty-four hours, if things go right."

Ben muttered joyously, opened the sliding doors a meager gap, edged himself into the darkened dining-room, and closed the gap after him.

Yarrow yawned ostentatiously as he refilled his black pipe.

"Th' poor boob!" he murmured. "It's a shame to get his hopes up. What's the next job in your half-baked bean?"

"You admit this job's finished, then?"

"Sure! Ain't we throwing it up?"

"No," was Hart's placid answer. "We're bringing it to its logical conclusion. There's only one thing about you, Yarrow, that makes our partnership possible."

"Spill it! I ain't sensitive."

"You haven't got imagination enough to look beyond the end of your nose; but you've got sense enough to take orders from a smarter man."

Yarrow's feet struck the floor with a thump and he reared himself up in a rage.

"Me? Taking orders?" he snorted.

Hart held up his hand for silence and nodded significantly as they heard a motor stop before the house.

"There's Tracy now. Remember your promise, and let me handle this affair my own way, even if you do think I'm crazy. I had the devil's own time persuading Tracy to come here tonight."

"He's a yap to come!" interrupted Yarrow testily.

"Perhaps," grinned Hart, then added impressively: "But remember this: what finally fetched him was my assurance that we had found an important witness, whose testimony would make him the laughing-stock of Chicago if he tried to convict Adams on his present evidence. Evidently Captain Tracy hasn't forgotten our past kindnesses in giving him valuable information on cases we were covering for practise."

"Just the same, he's a fool to take the risk," insisted the investigator.

"It's being done right along—for police purposes," retorted the other. "Come, Jeff, let's pull together, now he's here."

"You're both crazy!" muttered Yarrow; but he signified his willingness to co-operate by restoring his feet to their perch on the desk.

"All right, Mr. Bertram!" called Hart.

The sliding doors opened grudgingly, and the old lawyer came blinking out of the dark into the brightly lighted room. He held in his hand a damp handkerchief with which he was constantly wiping his perspiring face; and he appeared otherwise bewildered and jumpy.

"I do wish you'd have Evans in my stead," he began plaintively.

"This case isn't up to Evans yet," retorted the analyst. "Make yourself comfortable, Mr. Bertram. Don't be surprised, whatever happens, and don't interrupt."

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And the old lawyer meekly sought an inconspicuous seat.

The hall door opened quietly and admitted Captain Tracy and Frederick Adams; the latter was handcuffed to one officer and closely followed by another.

It might be supposed that Adams would be rejoiced at the opportunity to escape from his cell for a while, even if it were only to revisit in close custody the scene of his cousin's murder; instead, his sullen and suspicious manner showed that he resented his little excursion and feared its outcome. He scowled blackly at the partners and quite disregarded Bertram's nervous greeting.

Apparently the police officers found their errand equally distasteful. The two subordinates stuck close to their prisoner and glanced about them with nervous distrust, while Captain Tracy was openly hostile. Indeed, of the seven men present, only the partners appeared to enjoy the meeting.

"Hello, Adams!" cried Yarrow, grinning over his pipe. "Been out o' the city, ain't you?"

"Can the guff!" growled Tracy. "What you done with Officer Jerrold?"

"Done with him?" repeated Hart, elevating his eyebrows. "Nothing at all! I don't presume to interfere with the police."

"You're dead right you don't—not in my district!" blustered the captain.

"Officer Jerrold is guarding a most important witness. We'll call him presently," explained Hart, with a swift wink that had its effect. "Take this chair across from me, captain. Mr. Adams and his—affinity—can take the other two."

"Put your back against that hall door, Holden," Tracy directed the second officer, and don't let anybody in or out without my orders. I'd be up before the trial board if it got about I'd sneaked Adams up here."

"You know very well," resumed Hart, "we couldn't have had a conference at the jail without all the reporters in Chicago sniffing at our heels. And, there were other reasons. It occurred to me, captain, that it might not be a bad idea for us to have an informal rehearsal of Adams's trial, just among ourselves, before we actually took our case into court. Only we'll reverse the usual procedure and introduce first the evidence for the defense."

"I'm perfectly willing to hear anything you got to say," answered Tracy suspiciously. "But I ain't making any bargain to give up what I know."

"Case complete, cap?" asked Yarrow, with a grin.

"The book's closed," said Tracy impressively. "You couldn't place a bet at any odds."

"How about the weapon?" yawned the investigator. "That's usually important in a murder case, hey?"

"We'll produce it when we need it," declared Tracy with patent exasperation. "Spiel away, Hart!"

"I'll be as brief as possible," returned the analyst. "Please understand, captain, I can prove every statement I make. But Mr. Adams is going to help me on some of the details."

"All the help you get from me you can put in your eye," retorted the prisoner, with a sour look. "I was brought here against my will and you can't make me talk."

"You'll talk fast enough when I'm ready for you," was the cool response.

"As I told Yarrow when we first discussed the case, the murder of Henry Barlow can be solved by answering the questions how, when, why, and by whom it was committed, and we know we have the correct solutions when the answers to the first three questions point inevitably to one person as the murderer. I'm going to answer the question 'why' first—give you the motive, in other words—because the solution of that problem clears up many points in the other three."

With this preamble, Hart gave them a synopsis of the story of Barlow's and Decker's life in Hope, as he had told it to Yarrow: Barlow's appointment as chief of police, Decker's inability to serve on the force and his return to the mine, the murder of Kellogg Campbell, the trial and acquital of Barlow, the lucky strike made by the two partners, and their coming to Chicago with their wealth. Then he proceeded to elaborate some of the more important details.

"In Hope, Decker was regarded as crazy; but harmless; only Barlow knew that, when in his occasional dizzy spells, his partner was liable to be seized with a homicidal mania. What had impelled him to murder Campbell, Decker was never able to explain. He had been on his way back to the mine, after a prolonged spree, had bumped against a man in the dark, and had felt one of his dizzy spells coming on. The next he knew, Barlow was shaking him back

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to his senses and demanding, 'What the devil's up?' Afterward he vaguely recalled beating an unresisting form with a heavy fragment of rock while a cuckoo-clock somewhere near was shrilling the hour of eleven.

"When he realized what he had done, Decker demanded that the chief jail him pending the coroner's inquest, but Barlow felt that his partner was not morally guilty; moreover, in examining the body for some signs of life, he had discovered that the murdered man carried on his person a large sum in currency—and Barlow wanted that money. So, having exacted Decker's promise not to talk, Barlow sent his partner on to the mine; and then, before giving the alarm, Hope's trusted chief of police robbed the dead man of his money-belt.

"Barlow's sudden fall from grace is not altogether surprising. His reputation in Chicago shows that money was everything to him; and his long and unsuccessful struggle to get it honestly must have made him bitter and desperate. So when this fortune was thrust into his hands, as it were, the temptation was too strong for him. And he had every reason to believe that his reputation in Hope, and his position as chief of police, would enable him to keep suspicion from himself as well as his partner.

"Decker first learned of the stolen money through the inquiry instituted by Campbell's lawyer. Enraged and alarmed, he threatened to confess the double crime. Then the lure of the gold got him, too, when it was spread before him, and Decker ended by swearing to remain silent in return for half of the stolen money. So, after a while, the partners proclaimed their lucky strike, made their clean up, and departed unchallenged for Chicago.

"Apparently Barlow's conscience never troubled him. But Decker's conscience was less tractable. He was haunted both by unpleasant memories and by the knowledge that his mental condition was not improving. When, not long after their arrival in Chicago, his wife fulfilled his dearest hopes by bearing him a child, he almost believed that his sin had been forgiven; but his wife never fully recovered her health, and her early death appeared to Decker as a vengeance from Heaven."

"You sure do love to hear yourself talk!" sneered Tracy, as Hart paused to select a paper from the pile before him. "Why don't you make a try for the story lady's job in your old department store? It's a shame to waste your gift o' gab on a bunch of bull-necked cops."

Hart smiled with weary indulgence.

"I've simply been relating facts accessible to any one who would take the trouble to look them up. But here—" with his most impressive manner the analyst held up for inspection a folded paper—"here is evidence you'd never have found, unless you radically changed your methods."

"Where'd you get it, then?" demanded the police captain.

"Ben found it in the cuckoo-clock," explained Yarrow, with a bland smile, "and he turned it over to me because we was looking for the murderer, not trying to frame up an easy mark."

Tracy flushed angrily, but made no reply. His attention was held by Hart who was offering him the folded paper.

"Will you read it, captain, or shall I?"

The captain took the paper, unfolded it, and scanned it briefly. Even his professional stoicism did not enable him to repress a slight start.

"You sure this is genuine?" he asked with frank interest.

"It's their handwriting, if that's what you mean. Half a dozen handwriting experts will swear to that."

"You better read it," said Tracy, returning the paper with a new respect in his voice; then he added, somewhat shamefacedly, "I s'pose you know you're giving your case away?"

"That's my intention," smiled Hart. "This document, gentlemen, was executed jointly and in duplicate by Peter Decker and Henry Barlow, over twenty years ago at Hope, Arizona. The exact date is not material. It reads as follows:

This is to certify that the late Kellogg Campbell, of New York, attacked me on Mesquite Street, Hope, Arizona, on the evening of such a date, while both of us were under the influence of liquor. In defending myself, I struck him several blows with a rock, so that he died.

While greatly regretting his death, I swear to God that I am innocent of his murder, because he struck the first blow. PETER DECKER.

This is to certify that I found the aforesaid Peter Decker in the condition and on the night above stated, and that other circumstances bear out his above declaration.

This further certifies that, in view of the lack of witnesses to the attack, I believe myself justified in advising Decker not to reveal to a living soul the above regrettable accident. HENRY BARLOW.

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A tense silence followed the reading of this remarkable statement of the concealing of an old crime; yet to none of the more important auditors did it appear to be wholly news.

Finally Bertram asked with an apologetic cough—

"Am I to understand, Mr. Hart, that this most amazing agreement was executed in duplicate, and that each of the signatories had a copy?"

"Exactly," replied Hart. "And, if you care to examine the agreement, you'll see that each man wrote out his statement in his own hand."

"I'll take your word for that, sir. But," shaking his head in grave perplexity, "from my close association with the late Henry Barlow, as his legal adviser, I can't conceive of his executing a document so incriminating, much less his delivering a copy into the possession of even his most intimate friend."

"How you going to get round that?" asked Tracy, grinning as triumphantly as if he himself had challenged the validity of the agreement. "And what became of Decker's copy?"

"It's my opinion," replied Hart with the utmost composure, "that Barlow originally suggested this agreement for two purposes: first, to salve Decker's conscience by making him feel that he had actually confessed his crime; and second, to have a tangible hold on Decker in case he should discover that Barlow had added robbery to murder. As the shadows darkened over Decker, Barlow began to realize keenly his mistake in entrusting such damning evidence to the keeping of a crazy man. He made many futile attempts to get possession of Decker's copy, both by purchase and by theft; but Decker swore that he had destroyed his copy. To make himself entirely safe, Barlow hit upon the diabolical scheme of installing the cuckoo-clock to remind Decker constantly of the old murder and thus aggravate his malady so as to render him incompetent to testify in a court of law. At the same time, he used his own copy to keep Decker under his thumb; and Decker's repeated attempts to rob the safe were prompted by his desire to break Barlow's hold on him by destroying the confession.

"At the outset, Barlow appears to have handled their mutual business affairs with strict honesty; but, as his fear of his crazy partner became an obsession, he began a systematic despoiling of Decker, that led to constant quarrels. Not unnaturally, Decker assumed that Adams was fully aware of his cousin's dishonesty, if not actually a party to it. We know that Decker loves Miss Ann, after his own crazy fashion. Can we blame him if he objected to Adams as a son-in-law?

"So that, gentlemen, brings us back to our original question: Did Peter Decker have sufficient motive to justify accusing him of murdering Henry Barlow?"

"If you ask me," said Tracy, "I'd say he was a skunk if he didn't croak the devil!"

"Mr. Adams?"

The prisoner had sat throughout Hart's narration without sound or movement to betray his thoughts. At the analyst's abrupt question, he looked up, startled, and drew a long, audible breath.

"I'm not talking," he said huskily.

"Mr. Bertram?"

"He had the motive—certainly. But, according to Slocum's unchallenged testimony, he lacked the opportunity."

"You agree, captain?"

"Sure! You can't buck against facts."

"Then the verdict in the case of the People *vs.* Decker is, for the time being, best expressed in the noncommittal Scotch phrase, 'Not proven!' Let's suppose, now, that Decker lied when he said he destroyed his copy of the agreement, and that Adams found it. Do you appreciate the advantage that would give Adams?"

A common sigh of astonishment assured Hart that he had made his point; but he drove it home.

"Adams would dominate the situation. He could use that incriminating document to force Decker to consent to his marrying Miss Ann, or to compel Barlow to draw up a will making him chief beneficiary. Furthermore, given this detailed confession of the murder, Adams would have had no difficulty in getting additional information from Hope; and, by putting two and two together, he could easily have deduced the robbery. I did, long before I had any hint that such an agreement was ever drawn. Thus he would be in a position to surrender the agreement to Decker, without losing his hold on his cousin.

"Now we mustn't forget—as Adams appears to have done—that Miss Ann knows every whim and mood of her father. She

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would not be long in discovering that Adams had something on her father, which he was using to force Decker into consenting to their marriage. However much Miss Ann may have loved Adams, she would inevitably resent this; and Adams was in no position to give a reasonable explanation. So, if our assumptions are correct, we have the explanation of the mysterious quarrel that estranged the lovers on the eve of the murder.

"By his own testimony, Adams carried his quarrel to his cousin. He must have realized that Miss Ann would never forgive his treatment of her father, and it's reasonable to suppose that he demanded a cash settlement with Barlow, intending to leave Chicago for good. From our knowledge of Barlow's character, and the evidence produced at the inquest, we may justly assume that he gave Adams his choice between waiting to inherit everything under the latest will, or an immediate cash settlement of ten thousand dollars. Very likely the check represented only a small part of the sum demanded by Adams, Barlow refused to be further coerced, Adams lost his temper and his head—and the murder followed."

For a long moment Hart's audience sat silent, rapt by the spell of his climax; then Tracy leaned half across the table to grasp the inert hand of the analyst.

"By George, Hart—and you, too, Yarrow—you've done yourselves proud! I knew I had the rope, but you've tied the hangman's knot. I'll see you don't lose by it." He turned and nodded briefly to Officer Bristow. "Come along, Adams, the show's over!"

Adams stumbled obediently to his feet in response to Bristow's tug at the "come-alongs" that fettered them together; but he paused to glare at Hart.

"You —— crook!" he snarled. "You'll never make me believe that's what Ann Decker paid you for!"

"It's all guesswork!" stormed Bertram, flourishing his handkerchief excitedly. "You haven't made a case. You haven't made a case!"

"Not for you, maybe," grinned Tracy, starting for the door. "'Night, folks!"

"Just a minute!" interposed Hart. "Captain, if my assumptions are correct, how do you explain the anonymous letter directing you to the will?"

"I got enough without that," retorted the captain, but he stayed his progress toward the door.

"I can't agree with you. That's one very important and very weak link in your chain of evidence. Another is your failure to discover the weapon. Another is Adams's not attempting to make his getaway, when he had a good nine hours' start of you. And there's the incomplete identification of the man seen leaving the house after the murder."

"We've proved that was Adams!" snapped the captain; and Officer Holdane nodded emphatic agreement.

"You've proved nothing of the kind!" retorted Hart somewhat tartly. "All these incomplete clews point conclusively away from Adams. And, captain, have you forgotten Officer Jerrold and his important witness?"

Tracy's heavy jaw dropped and he fiddled nervously with his mustache.

"You got me right," he admitted sheepishly. "Keep your seats, boys, it's only the intermission."

"I—I beg your pardon, Hart," stammered Adams.

Bertram flourishing his handkerchief like a palm of triumph, trotted back to his inconspicuous seat, chuckling—

"I told you he hadn't made a case!"

Hart acknowledged these several apologies with a gracious waye of the hand, exchanged gleeful winks with Yarrow, and lifted up his voice:

"All right, Ben! Come ahead!"

At the summons, the sliding doors leading to the dining-room rolled back. On one side of the opening stood Ben, grinning happily, with a big revolver clutched in his right hand; on the other side posed Officer Jerrold, disdaining obvious weapons. Between them, securely bound and gagged, sat Franklin Welding.

CHAPTER XXIV

DECKER'S COPY

AS THE babel of surprised exclamations subsided, Hart rose and took the center of the floor like a stage director. When, at his request, Welding had been seated directly behind Adams, the analyst smilingly addressed his wondering audience.

"Here," he said, "are the hats of the two

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prisoners—the very ones, presumably, that they wore on the night of the murder. I'll put them on their respective heads, just as they're accustomed to wear them—so. I believe that's the correct angle, eh, Yarrow?"

Yarrow nodded his approval, and Hart continued:

"Now we're going to turn off the lights."

"You are not!" cried Tracy, starting to his feet and signing to Jerrold. "If you think you can pull any disappearing act on me——"

Hart waved him back with a mocking grin.

"No tricks, captain, I promise. I'm planning to leave one light on. No harm in that, is there?"

"I'll know when I dope your play," snapped the captain. "Stick close to Adams, Jerrold, and have your gun loose."

"All right, Yarrow, the lights!" chuckled Hart.

At the signal Yarrow snapped the incandescent bulbs off one by one, till there remained only a single light, by which the profiles of the two prisoners were dimly visible.

"Come over here by me, Holdane," commanded Hart. "You, too, captain. Ben, keep Welding's face to the light! Holdane, you're now seeing the two men in about the same half-darkness in which you saw a man leaving this house on the night of the murder. If you were under oath, wouldn't you have to take a second look to swear which was which?"

Officer Holdane looked, as requested, blinked his eyes, and looked again.

"They do look something alike," he reluctantly admitted.

"'Something alike!'" jeered the analyst. "There's the same lines to the nose, the same twist to the lips, the same peculiar carriage of the head—they might be twin brothers, in this light. All right, Yarrow!"

And as Yarrow flashed the lights on again, one by one, the strange resemblance of the prisoners faded before the growing illumination till no one would have ventured to say that they looked alike in any particular.

"Well, captain," asked Hart, "how do you think my little experiment would hit a jury? Do you still believe Holdane would be willing to swear it was Adams he saw the night of the murder?"

"I hope he tries it!" chuckled Bertram.

Tracy gave the old lawyer a sour look and turned upon his subordinate half angrily:

"What do you say, Holdane? Tell 'em the truth!"

"I—I'm sorry, captain," stammered Holdane uncomfortably, "but I won't dare take my oath it was Adams I saw."

"Hump!" sneered Tracy, apparently not surprised at the answer. "But that don't prove anything against Welding, Mr. Cocksure Hart! You ain't shown he had any motive for croaking old Barlow."

"I'm coming to that. When I told you how Barlow was tried for Campbell's murder, I omitted one rather important fact. Campbell had a son Lewis, who accompanied the New York attorney to Hope."

"Hey?" Yarrow nearly dropped his pipe in his indignation. "You been holding out on me again?" he bellowed, shaking his fist under his partner's nose. "How in —— you s'pose I'm going to work if you send me off half-cocked?"

"It's your habit to go off half-cocked!" was the biting retort. "Sit down, now, and keep still. I'll give you a chance in a minute to do your stunt."

And Yarrow, dazed and crestfallen, submissively sought comfort in his pipe.

"The shock of Campbell's death killed his wife," resumed Hart, "and young Campbell came to Hope bent on revenge. Although his efforts proved futile, he returned to Hope periodically, and his unceasing efforts to find new clews became a town joke.

"Now it happened that Decker lied when he told Barlow of destroying his copy of the agreement; and when he learned through a newspaper item that Campbell was again in Hope, Decker mailed his copy and Barlow's address to the young man. It was a crazy thing for Decker to do, because the agreement equally incriminated him; but we know Decker *is* crazy—at least, at times. Anyhow, his letter, after many wanderings, finally brought Lewis Campbell to Chicago, where he assumed the name of Franklin Welding."

"What?" roared Tracy, and burst into laughter.

"Look at Welding!" retorted Hart, nodding toward the trussed-up prisoner whose face was suffused with blood while his eyes glared madly at the imperturbable analyst. "This man has established his identity as Welding by means of ample funds and some forged credentials.

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"In spite of the agreement, young Campbell still believed Barlow had murdered his father; but the law had pronounced Barlow guiltless. Seeking to get something on Barlow through his connection with the Deckers, Campbell incidentally fell in love with Miss Ann. When he discovered that Barlow was deliberately bleeding the girl's father, he hoped to put himself on an even footing with Adams by interfering. It was for that purpose that Campbell surreptitiously visited Barlow shortly after eleven on the twenty-third of June. Barlow recognized Lewis Campbell from his resemblance to his father and reached for the revolver he kept handy in the drawer of his desk. But when young Campbell merely demanded an accounting of Decker's affairs for Miss Ann's sake, Barlow laughed at him and declared that he had already arranged that Adams should get both the money and the girl. In proof, he exhibited the will and the ten-thousand-dollar check as a payment 'on account.' And Campbell, in a jealous rage, murdered him before he could use his revolver.

"Campbell believed that the only possible evidence against him was Barlow's copy of the agreement. Failing to find this, he carried away Barlow's last will, to spite the dead man. Later, when he learned that Yarrow was on his trail, and that Miss Ann still loved Adams, he hid the will here and directed Captain Tracy where to find it, hoping to make the girl believe Adams had murdered his cousin in order that he might inherit. He gave himself away when he tried to frighten Miss Ann into marrying him to hush him up, and Yarrow and Ben caught him as he was making his getaway, after knocking me out."

THE tense silence that followed the ending of Hart's story was broken by Tracy's surly voice.

"I ain't sure I won't be glad yet it was *you* made the pinch. There's holes in your case I could drive the 'blue wagon' through. How was Barlow murdered?"

"That's Yarrow's story," replied the analyst. "Take the floor, Jeff, and show the police how an amateur sleuth works."

Yarrow cocked his hat at a defiant angle, settled himself comfortably against the table, and surveyed the company with a mocking grin.

"First thing I looked for was the weapon," he began. "'Cording to Doc Noble, it had to be something that would both crush and tear—and a broken cane looked like a good bet. But when I got a peek at Barlow—with the newspaper guys—I begun to hedge on my bet. And the more I chewed over it, the surer I got that a cane never done for Barlow. Ben and Adams both said that Barlow wouldn't have nothing about that looked like a weapon; but I had a hunch he'd left a club handy, just the same. So I did my looking right here in the house."

"You were out on the prairie lots with the boys for a week," interrupted Tracy.

"Sure!" grinned Yarrow. "Glad you noticed it, captain. It was for your benefit. I knew, before I'd been on the case an hour, what killed Barlow. Queer things, cuckoo-clocks is. Keep good time, once you get 'em regulated; but when they get out o' whack, it's a man's job getting 'em right again. Mind if I open the hall door, cap, and show you just how she works?"

At Tracy's curt "Go ahead!" Yarrow swung the hall door wide open, so that the silent clock should be visible from all parts of the living-room.

"You wind up a cuckoo-clock by pulling up a weight. This big clock o' Barlow's takes three weights, as you see. The middle one's for the time; the one on the right, when you're facing the clock, winds up the cuckoo that strikes the hour; the left one's for the quarters—the whippoorwill, they call it. If you take the middle weight off its chain, you stop the whole shebang; but if you only take away one o' the side weights, you just put that side out o' commish while it's off—she begins right where she left off when you put the weight back on again.

"All the cuckoo-clocks I ever see run true to form—they've all got a roof like a Swiss shack, a lot o' leaves and birds and other flumdiddles carved onto them, and metal weights shaped like pine-cones. On a big clock like Barlow's here, those weights weigh four or five pounds apiece."

"What you getting at?" demanded Tracy incredulously. "Do you think Barlow was slugged with a weight off his own clock?"

"I know he was," was the calm answer. "It's the first thing hopped into my nut when I see how the land lay. They wasn't nothing else about the place a man could use for a club. You've said so yourself, more'n once. So it had to be one of the

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weights. Here's the way I figured it was done."

The investigator stepped out into the hall and demonstrated as he talked.

"I'm Campbell—see? I sneak in after Ben and Adams clears out, that night. I don't pack a gat, understand, 'cause I'm figuring on claiming self-defense if I get caught. But I know Barlow keeps a gun handy—everybody's wise to that. The way I dope it, he's liable to pull it on me when I butt in; and I ain't aiming to go up against an old gunman with only my two fists.

"I rubbers around for something to baste him with if he gets funny, and I see the cuckoo-clock. I grabs off the first weight I come to—happens it's the one that runs the whippoorwill. It slips out of the hook on the chain easy, like this. I heft it, and it swings purty good.

"I slide it up my coat sleeve—so—like a holdup does his blackjack, so's it'll drop into my fist when it's needed. Then I open the door easy and sneak in. Mebbe you ain't noticed Campbell wears gumshoe heels, like I do?— Barlow's so busy cussing all creation he don't know I'm on the job till I blow down the back o' his neck."

Carrying out his demonstration, Yarrow was now standing close against the left side of Hart, who was again occupying Barlow's big chair. The demonstrator's right hand swung at his side, with the murderous weapon still concealed in his sleeve.

"We chew the rag a bit—the old man makes me, and tells me the gold goes to his nevvy Fred, and the girl follows the gold. That gets my goat. He gets a 'safety first' hunch and goes for his gun. Before he can throw down on me, I slide the weight into my fist and let him have it; and then—well, you seen what happened then."

So well did Yarrow enact his rôle of murderer, so lightning quick was he in starting the first stunning blow, that the startled spectators did not realize that he had stayed his hand just at the moment of impact. And a common sigh went up as Yarrow lowered his weapon and grinned his appreciation of the panic he had started.

"The devil!" muttered Tracy, settling back in his chair. "I was just figuring whether I'd send a plain wreath or blow myself for a 'Gates Ajar.'"

"Just heft the thing, cap," requested Yarrow. "If you hold her by the pointed end, she swings fine; you could get in a peach of a crack with the butt."

Tracy tried out the weight both ways and admitted that Yarrow had the right dope.

"Now look at that butt," continued the investigator; "it's notched all along the rim to make it look like a pine-cone. 'Corrugated,' Doc Noble calls it. And look at the screw-eye that you hook the chain into. See how it's bent half-way out o' plumb? If any gent here'll lemme bounce it on his bean, I'll guarantee to comb his back hair up into slivers, like Barlow's was. That crooked screw-eye's bound to catch and tear, 'specially if the crack don't register a bull's-eye."

"By Jove, you're right!" ejaculated the captain, bringing the weight down hard upon his left hand so as to catch the "feel" of the blow. "It would crush and tear at the same time, just like the doctor said."

"But the weight must have been bloody," objected Bertram. "And it certainly wasn't hung back in place in that condition."

"It was bloody." The captain anticipated Yarrow's answer. "Don't you remember where we found it had been wiped dry on Barlow's dressing-gown?"

"Not quite dry," said Yarrow. "Look down into the neck o' the screw-eye, cap."

Tracy looked and uttered an exclamation of disgust.

"That's what cinched it," continued Yarrow; "that and the fact that that weight was the only one o' the three that was abso-lute-ly clean o' dust. I guess Barlow's cook's as clean a lady as you'd want to have keep house for you; but we all know how it is in Chicago—a thing that ain't been dusted for a few hours 's bound to have some dust on it."

"That nearly completes our case, captain," said Hart, breaking the silence. "We stand prepared to prove to any jury that Campbell had the motive for murdering Barlow, and that Welding and Campbell are the same man; we will likewise prove that Mr. Welding-Campbell can not satisfactorily account for his movements between the hours of ten and twelve on the night of the murder, June twenty-third. Do you need any further evidence to convince you?"

"You got a good case," admitted Tracy. "But how about Decker's copy of the agreement? Your whole case falls down, if you can't produce that."

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"We've never seen it," was the astounding answer.

"Where is it, then? What's the joke?"

"It's still in Campbell's possession, of course," replied Hart. "That's the reason we tied him up so tight, so he couldn't get rid of it."

Tracy started eagerly toward the glowering prisoner, then stopped to turn a doubting eye upon the speaker.

"How do I know this ain't a put-up job?" he demanded.

"I give you my word, captain, it's nothing of the sort. Officer Jerrold helped Yarrow and Ben tie him up, and he's been right with Campbell ever since. We never had a chance to frame him. Isn't that right, Jerrold?"

"Yes, sir," answered the officer readily.

"You're sure they didn't get a chance to hide nothing on him?"

"Dead sure, captain. He ain't been out o' my sight for a minute."

"All right. Where'll I look for the paper, Hart?"

"I don't know," was the surprising answer. "I'm staking our whole case on my belief that it's on him somewhere. It must be on him!"

Tracy stared unbelieving; but Hart's evident sincerity strengthened his growing suspicion that the police had been outdone by the amateur dicks; and, regardless of the light in which this fact would place his own activities, he was again the zealous officer, keen on the scent of a fresh and most unexpected clue.

"We'll soon see," he muttered; "but we'll have to ease these ropes off a bit. You couldn't get a knife-blade between them and his hide."

"Go as far as you like," acceded Hart.

As the tightly wound ropes eased away from his rigid body, Campbell expelled through his gag a great sigh of relief; but, apparently convinced that opposition would be useless, he made no attempt to hinder the search.

With scant ceremony, Tracy removed Campbell's tie and collar, pulled open the front of his shirt, and thrust an exploring hand into the opening. For a moment he groped aimlessly; then, with a grunt of satisfaction, he extended his left hand to Jerrold.

"Gimme your knife—open," he demanded.

Jerrold responded with alacrity, loosened the bonds a little more at Tracy's command, and so enabled the captain to slice the open knife down alongside what he was gripping in his right hand. There was a rending of cloth, a muffled exclamation from Campbell, and Tracy triumphantly waved aloft a ragged bit of muslin.

"Inside shirt pocket," he explained. "It may be a bum steer, but it sure felt like paper. Top's pinned with a safety-pin," he continued, as he examined his find. "That's why I couldn't get into it. I thought it was sewed or I wouldn't used the knife. Now, let's see——"

He unclasped the safety-pin, thrust his fingers into the severed pocket and pulled out an envelope, worn soft and feathery with much carrying about.

"I'll wager it's the very letter Decker wrote him!" cried Hart, in sudden excitement. "Open it, quick!"

"You win!" declared Tracy, as he scanned the worn envelope. "Addressed to 'Lewis Campbell, Hope, Arizona,' near as I can make it. Here's your letter, too, I guess; and—by Jove! You're right, Hart, here's the very paper! Let's have Barlow's copy. Better get in on this, Bertram, you're wise to this sort of thing."

The three men bent their heads above the two copies of the twenty-year-old agreement, whispering eagerly as they compared contents and signatures; while the two prisoners breathlessly awaited the verdict.

"Good enough!" pronounced Tracy at length with a deep sigh. "What say, Bertram?"

Bertram mopped his forehead, pursed his lips, and meekly extended his hand.

"Mr. Hart, if I should ever be tempted to go into criminal practise—which the good Lord forbid—my first move would be to offer a retainer to Yarrow & Hart!"

CHAPTER XXV

FOR HER SAKE

CAPTAIN TRACY turned to the two prisoners with a grim smile on his lips:

"Mr. Adams, you'll have to go back to jail tonight, but we'll turn you out just as quick as we can get a judge on the job. Bristow, take those bracelets off him and hook yourself on to Campbell; and you and Jerrold get the ropes and gag off."

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The two officers obeyed; and Campbell stretched his stiff limbs cautiously and croaked a husky demand for water; while Adams, still dazed by his sudden freedom, mutely shook the many hands extended to him.

Then Ben produced a box of cigars long treasured against this happy occasion, and, under cover of the general "smoking up," Hart drew Tracy aside, and whispered to him eagerly. At first the police captain objected half angrily; but finally he nodded assent and ordered:

"Bristow, couple your prisoner on to a table-leg. You three officers can wait in the kitchen till I call you."

"We'll have to ask you to go with them, Ben," added Hart.

As the four men reluctantly obeyed, Tracy settled himself comfortably and favored Yarrow and Hart with a rueful smile.

"I got to hand it to you two," he said. "You got my goat for fair. But I ain't quite sure yet how you figured it all out."

Hart removed his monogrammed cigaret and contemplated its spiral of blue-gray smoke before he answered.

"All my life I've made it my business to analyze facts," he said in his most impressive manner, "and always with the purpose of making my deductions absolutely unprejudiced by the obvious. In spite of the apparent evidence against him, it was utterly impossible for me to conceive of a man of Mr. Adams's character committing such a murder."

"Do you mean to say," demanded Bertram, "that you didn't actually know Adams to be innocent when you were so boldly asserting that fact?"

"Certainly I knew—from my knowledge of human nature," was the placid rejoinder.

"Can you beat that?" gasped Tracy. "Playing a hunch, and getting away with it!"

"If you prefer to call it that," coolly assented Hart. "But remember, captain, we knew from the beginning exactly how Barlow was murdered."

"It was a dead open-and-shut proposition, at that," put in Yarrow with the reproachful sympathy of one expert to another who had blundered. "Soon's I heard the cuckoo'd been striking crazy, it made me suspicious o' the clock right away; and it proved Doc Noble had the right dope on when the murder was done. The whippoorwill's set to chirp every fifteen minutes, remember; and she chirped right when Adams and Ben were saying good night. Campbell probably swiped the weight before it struck the quarter-past, so, when Ben heard it next morning, the whippoorwill was lagging fifteen minutes behind the rest of the clock. Only thing that could mean was the whippoorwill weight'd been off the job for less'n fifteen minutes. It ain't allowing much time, but Campbell knew he'd got to work fast."

"Any other bets I overlooked?" asked Tracy.

"You were too sure about Decker's being wholly irrational," said Hart, taking up the accusing recital. "I doubt if he's ever entirely sane; but sometimes he pretends to be crazier than he really is."

"I came within an ace of hanging it on him," muttered Tracy, "only he had too strong an alibi."

"You'd probably have failed, if you'd tried it," agreed Bertram. "Slocum would have proved a difficult witness to impeach, because in setting up an alibi he claimed only that he and his ward had followed their ordinary nightly routine—and the testimony of your own Officer Holdane supported that."

"That's the way we figured it," said Hart with a satisfied glance at his partner; for the two had sworn Slocum never to mention to a soul Decker's visit to the dead man, under threat of an indictment for perjury.

"And now," smiled the analyst, "since we've finally proved him innocent, perhaps Mr. Adams will be willing to break his long silence and explain one or two points that are still obscure."

"I don't see that you've left much for me to explain," said Adams.

"Nothing to explain!" cried Tracy. "What were you trying to get yourself hung for?"

"What was your scrap with Miss Ann?" demanded Yarrow.

"Why were you so anxious to get out on bail?" added Bertram. "And yet so determined that we should make no effort to defend you?"

"And why," concluded Hart, "did Barlow alter his will in your favor?"

Adams laughed somewhat confusedly, studied the floor for a moment, and then faced the eager circle about him.

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"I've no objection to talking—now. Ann broke our engagement, the evening of June twenty-third, when she caught Cousin Henry in a barefaced attempt to ruin her father through a fake real-estate deal, to which I appeared to be a party. I did know of the intended fraud; but Cousin Henry had promised me to give up the scheme, and I had not warned Ann for fear of hurting her by exposing her father's utter incompetence. I realized my mistake when it was too late; but she was so angry at the time—and with good reason—that I didn't attempt to explain, and so made another mistake.

"I went in to tell Cousin Henry that I would take the matter into court, if necessary, unless he agreed to an immediate and honest accounting of every dollar that he had handled for Mr. Decker. I had no actual proof that there had been previous frauds, but I had some very strong suspicions. He dumfounded me by swearing that the money was rightfully his anyhow; and before I realized what he was driving at, he had told me the whole story of the murder of Kellogg Campbell twenty years ago, and the robbery that followed."

Adams interrupted his narration to address the son of the murdered man, and his voice and manner showed his sympathy:

"Hart's story of the crime is corroborated in every detail by what my cousin told me. Your father was the victim of an unfortunate accident, due entirely to Mr. Decker's condition. The robbery was my cousin's doing, according to his own declaration to me; but, under the circumstances, I can't say that I blame you for what you did."

"Thanks!" sneered the prisoner. "But *I* haven't confessed yet, remember."

Adams flushed somewhat, but answered only with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Did your cousin mention the agreement?" asked Hart.

"He never even hinted at it. I didn't know such a thing existed until you produced it tonight. Then Cousin Henry showed me the will leaving everything to me and suggested that I could get both Ann and the money by helping him 'smash that fool Decker!' When I told him what I thought of him and his schemes, he flew into a rage and wrote me that check for ten thousand. He told me I could either turn the money over to Ann, or keep it myself and keep still; but that neither Decker nor I would ever get another cent from him. I flung the check back in his face and wandered around the South Side half the night trying to decide how I could best help Ann.

"When Captain Tracy phoned me that my cousin was dead, my first thought was that Mr. Decker had squared his own accounts. I purposely drew suspicion upon myself to spare Ann, supposing that I could easily get out on bail and drag the case along until we could decide what to do about her father. The discovery that I was actually in peril of my life gave me some pretty bad hours. But what could I do then? Even if I should decide to tell the whole truth, probably no one but Ann would believe me, and, whatever might be her real feelings toward me, I couldn't bring myself to ask her to choose between her father and another man."

Hart nodded his big head in sympathetic understanding; then, seeing that Adams had concluded, he suggested:

"I don't think you've made it altogether clear, Mr. Adams, just why you wouldn't allow us to get at the facts for you. I'm not speaking alone for Yarrow & Hart—any responsible agency could have cleared up the case, as we've done, without involving Mr. Decker."

"The —— they could!" growled Yarrow.

"I won't grant that, Hart, any more than your partner will," retorted Adams. "I think you've done wonders. But I didn't believe that Cousin Henry's murder could be investigated without involving Mr. Decker. And you haven't been able to keep him out of it altogether, you know."

Hart nodded, apparently abashed; but the little twinkle in his eyes showed that he had expected Adams' answer.

"I wish you'd tell me," said Bertram, "why you were so anxious to get out on bail?"

"Mebbe you think a jail's a Summer resort," sneered Yarrow, "just because it's full o' bars."

Adams grinned.

"It was my plan to employ detectives to investigate my cousin's story and murder; but the investigation had to be conducted so carefully to keep Mr. Decker out of it, that I was afraid to try it while in jail. It's a good thing for Messrs. Yarrow & Hart that I was refused bail, for I certainly shouldn't have engaged them to handle the case."

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"Thanks just the same," said Hart, with the twinkle showing in his eyes again.

"For what?" demanded Adams.

"I told you you'd talk when I got ready for you," retorted the analyst; and Adams led the laughter.

Captain Tracy stretched himself, yawned, and slowly rose to his feet.

"Guess we'll be getting back to the North Side," he said.

Adams stood up promptly, but asked, half hesitatingly—

"Couldn't I see Ann just for a minute, captain, and let her know her worries are over?"

"No! No! No!" burst simultaneously from Tracy, Hart, and Bertram; and Hart explained:

"We can't tell her that, Mr. Adams. Her father killed Kellogg Campbell——"

"But that was twenty years ago!" objected Adams.

"Murder is never outlawed," declared the old lawyer very gravely.

"I'd ought to take the crazy man along now," interjected Tracy irresolutely.

"He's a dying man," pleaded Adams; "acute Bright's disease."

"You see," concluded the lawyer, "the best we can do is to tell Miss Ann that you and her father are safe in respect to the Barlow murder; and I'll undertake to relieve her mind to that extent."

"And I've got a word to say before this pleasant party breaks up," sneered Campbell.

THE others turned wonderingly to the glowering prisoner, who had sat so docilely under the restraint of the table-leg; only Hart appeared to think the request natural, if his twinkling eyes were to be believed.

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Tracy. "Ain't this talk-fest never going to end?"

"Afraid I'll show up another of your blunders?" was Campbell's taunting question.

"Anything you say will be used against you," answered Tracy grimly. "If you got a talking yen, remember that."

"I'll do my talking on one condition," snarled the prisoner.

"You ain't in any position to make conditions," growled the police captain.

Campbell leaned forward as far as the restraining table-leg would permit and rested his free fist on his knee. His voice was low and controlled; but his words carried a venom that brought a purple tinge into Tracy's red face.

"You're going to change your mind about that, captain. You've let Yarrow & Hart carry things with a high hand here because you needed their cooperation to save your face; but they can't help you when my counsel gets you on the witness stand. How are you going to explain your bringing Adams here without a court order? Or keeping me bound and gagged for hours, without even the formality of arresting me? One of your men was in that, remember. Or trying and convicting me here in your mock court, without giving me a chance to defend myself?"

"You're very much mistaken," interjected Bertram, "if you imagine that a recital of your wrongs will materially affect the verdict of the jury."

"—— the jury!" snarled Campbell. "I'm thinking of what the trial board will have to say to Captain Tracy! Don't you think you'd better come to terms, captain?"

"What's your offer?" was Tracy's surly question.

"I'll forget what's happened here tonight —on one condition."

"Spill it!"

But Campbell turned first to Bertram.

"Isn't Hart's evidence enough to convict me, without using those old agreements?"

"I'm inclined to think it is," was the cautious answer.

"And without the agreements, Barlow could be made to appear as my father's murderer, in spite of his acquittal?"

"Yes—it could be managed," assented the lawyer.

"Then destroy those papers!"

"What's your object?" demanded Tracy suspiciously, while the others gasped.

"I should think it was plain enough!" cried Adams indignantly. "Don't you see he's trying to protect Ann? Campbell, I've put in a good part of my time in jail hating you, but——"

Campbell struck aside the extended hand and glowered malevolently at the speaker.

"Generous, aren't you?" he sneered. "With all the luck breaking your way! Keep away from me, you —— hypocrite! God! If I only had my two hands!"

The prisoner's voice broke in a tumble of oaths as he struggled frantically to free

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himself. Tracy caught him by the collar, slammed him down into his chair, and stood over him threateningly.

"Cut it!" snapped the captain. "Cut it, before I call the patrol!"

"I think, captain," said Hart softly, "you're beginning to understand why I asked you to bring Mr. Adams here, and why I advised getting the others out of the room."

Tracy nodded shortly; and the silence remained unbroken until Campbell demanded huskily:

"Well, captain? Is it a bargain?"

Tracy turned to Bertram. .

"You're a lawyer—how about it? It looks like risky business to me."

"It is," agreed Bertram. "It's a clear case of subornation; but—" He pursed his lips thoughtfully—"I'm willing to take the risk, for Miss Ann's sake."

"You take the risk!" sneered Campbell, showing his teeth in a scornful grin.

Bertram turned to the prisoner and spoke with a gravity that gave added weight to his words:

"Mr. Campbell, in spite of your unhappy position, I honor you for your endeavor to protect an innocent girl from further suffering; but I consider that I should be false to the ethics of my profession if I failed to warn you of the full consequences of what you have proposed."

"Consider it said!" snarled the prisoner; but Bertram proceeded with an unmoved gravity that shamed Campbell into listening.

"The destruction of these incriminating papers will constitute a felony, for which all present and conniving will make themselves liable to the most severe penalties, if the facts should become known. It is my understanding, however, that we are unanimous in considering the deed justified by the circumstances, and that we are tacitly pledged to complete secrecy."

He paused to question with his eyes each man present, and from each he received an unhesitating nod of assent.

"To you, Mr. Campbell, the possible consequences are even more serious. Those two papers constitute your greatest justification and defense for your crime. They are proven confessions of the two men who both murdered and robbed your father. While the State is exceedingly jealous of its prerogative as a dispenser of justice, and the law requires every pleader to come into court with clean hands, a jury is only human and is peculiarly liable to be lenient with a defendant who has taken the law into his own hands because of an apparent miscarriage of justice. So I must warn you—in destroying these agreements, you will probably destroy your last hope of escaping the extreme penalty for your crime."

"Don't do it!" cried Adams. "We'll find another way."

"You keep out of this!" interrupted Campbell with a look of implacable hatred. "Bertram, can this matter be kept quiet if the papers are destroyed?"

"Besides those here present, only Ben and the officers know of these agreements—and they can be managed. I think you may consider the secret safe, Mr. Campbell," concluded the lawyer.

The prisoner nodded shortly, and a look of grim satisfaction came over his haggard face. Then his eyes fell upon Yarrow and Hart, who were standing happily side by side, and his look darkened again.

"A good night's work for Yarrow & Hart, eh?" he asked, then chuckled sardonically at their respective bandages. "You're a very transparent shadow, Yarrow. I suspected you from the time you took the room next to mine. You make a better actor than a detective. That demonstration with the cuckoo clock was quite artistic. You were right about my being unarmed; but I didn't hide the weight up my sleeve, because I didn't have it the first time."

"The first time?" gasped the investigator.

"That's what I said," grinned Campbell. "Barlow drove me out at the point of his gun, when I lost my temper with him. I gave him time to get back at his desk, unhooked the weight and got up behind him, on my rubber heels, before he knew I was there."

"I don't believe it!" declared Yarrow.

"You fool!" snarled the prisoner. "Do you suppose I could do all I did in fifteen minutes? I put the weight back before I started in on his papers."

Accustomed though they were to regarding the man as a self-confessed murderer, the others were shocked into silence by his callous absorption in the details of his crime.

"It wasn't a bad idea, at that—hiding the weight up my sleeve," muttered Campbell. "If I'd thought of that in the first

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place, I'd have left before Holdane reached the corner, and I'd be a free man today."

"Mebbe," said Yarrow. "And then again—mebbe not."

"You'll never see me hanged!" declared Campbell with a mocking grin. "I'm through, captain. Now for the agreements!"

"How'll we get rid of 'em?" asked Tracy, looking helplessly to the others for suggestions.

"Burn them!" cried Campbell fiercely.

"It's the only safe way," agreed Hart. He took the two yellowed papers from the table and handed them to his partner. "Jeff, I think the honor is rightly yours."

Yarrow snatched at the papers with an eagerness that showed how much he appreciated the tactful compliment and pulled out his box of "safeties." And, while the others looked silently on, the investigator burned the papers to a cinder on the empty hearth and ground the ashes into impalpable dust under his heel.

CHAPTER XXVI

CHARGED OFF

ADAMS jumped out of the taxicab, paid the driver with unsteady fingers, and turned a joyous face toward the Cuckoo's Nest.

The crowd about the guarded gate surged eagerly toward the young man, and reporters surrounded him, demanding an interview.

"Not now, boys," he protested laughingly, as he shouldered his way to the gate. "Maybe I'll have some real news for you later."

The policeman guarding the gate swung it wide with one hand, while he raised the other in salute.

"I'm glad to see you back again, sir."

"Thanks, Holdane! I'm glad to be back. If you'll hold my friends off a bit——"

"That's captain's orders, sir." And Holdane swung the gate shut and faced the disappointed crowd with a grinning, "Nobody home, gents!"

A man was running down the steps to meet him; but Adams neither saw nor heard him until they were almost face to face. His eyes and thoughts were all for the girl whose white dress had flashed beacon-like through the piazza vines in response to the commotion at the gate.

"Mr. Adams! Oh, Mr. Adams!" gasped the runner.

"Well, Ben!" Adams clasped the extended hand in a firm grip. "I'm out at last, you see."

"Thank God, sir!" murmured Ben, unashamed of the sobs that shook his voice. "It was too tight a squeeze to suit me!"

Adams nodded absently, gave Ben's hand a parting grip, and quickened his pace. As he reached the top of the steps, he faltered and stopped. Bertram had told him Ann wanted to see him as soon as he was formally released; but the old lawyer either would not or could not tell him how she felt toward him. He knew she was waiting there; but his eyes were too dazzled from the brightness outside, or too misty with hope, for him to see her clearly.

But Ann did not hesitate. She knew her own heart, and guessed his. Regardless of the crowd beyond the gate, she walked into his half raised arms and clung to him, sobbing but content.

"THEN you really did love me all the while?" Ann asked for the thousandth time.

And Adams, secure now in the privacy of the Decker living-room, answered her as he had a thousand times before in the terms most convincing to lovers.

"Love you!" he added huskily. "If you'd known how it hurt me to treat you as I did—and it was all so useless!"

"Stop!" she commanded softly, covering his mouth with her hand. "It wasn't useless. It would have killed poor father. I'll never forget, Fred, that you did it for my sake."

She stopped and sighed again.

"Poor father! I never thought I'd be glad of his condition—but he couldn't have realized what he was doing when he took half the money, could he, Fred?"

"Of course not!" Adams assured her. "Nobody will ever blame your father, sweetheart."

"And your cousin has paid." She shivered and clung to him, half sobbing: "Fred! You'll take me away from this horrible house?"

"You're sure you want to give up everything?" questioned Adams. "Bertram tells me we could probably compromise with Campbell."

"Fred! You wouldn't do that. For my

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part, I can't help hoping the money will enable Mr. Campbell to get free. He was so good to father—and he tried to help me."

She broke off and glanced at him almost fearfully, lest he should place the wrong construction on her words. But Adams smiled at her reassuringly and completed her tribute.

"He did help you, Ann, more than you'll ever know. I doubt if I could have done as well under the same circumstances."

And Adams sighed with sincere regret that, for her own sake, he could never tell Ann how nobly Campbell had sacrificed himself, to spare Ann the knowledge that her father had been a murderer.

Something in Adams's manner started a vague suspicion in Ann's mind, and she looked up to question him. But the matter fled forever from her thoughts as the hall door burst open and Decker and Slocum stumbled into the room in close embrace.

"Master in my own house," the crazy man was muttering, as he wrestled indignantly with his nurse.

"It's all right, Mr. Slocum," nodded the girl. "Was there anything you wanted, father?"

Decker mumbled incoherently, and she went to him, while Slocum turned to Adams with a shamefaced grin.

"What is it now?" Adams asked in an undertone.

"Same old thing," explained Slocum. "Hunting for some blame' paper—Barlow's will, I s'pose."

Adams nodded and shrugged his shoulders; then Ann's hand fell on his arm, and he turned to face his future father-in-law. Decker was staring at him with dull unwinking eyes, as if little interested in what he saw; and Adams observed that Ann held her father's hand in a firm clasp.

"You remember Mr. Adams, who's been so kind to us," she was saying in a level, matter-of-fact tone. "He's been away."

"What you doing here?" demanded Decker, apparently puzzled. "They buried Barlow a year ago."

"I've been straightening out his affairs," answered Adams easily. "Mr. Decker, Ann and I are going to be married in two weeks." Decker started, but Adams gave him no chance to speak. "I know you won't object, now that my cousin is gone. We're going to move away to another part of the city that Barlow never saw, and we want you and Slocum to come and live with us."

"I can't go," said Decker not obstinately, but regretfully. "I can't go until I've found the paper."

"The paper?" exclaimed Adams. "Why, Mr. Decker, don't you remember? Barlow was cremated, and the paper was burned with his body!"

Decker staggered and trembled so that Adams added his support to Ann's; then the crazy man gently released himself, passed his dry hand across his eyes, and burst into the muted laugh that once had set Yarrow's teeth on edge.

"Of course!" he cackled. "Of course! I must be crazy!"

FINALLY convinced that Adams's promised news was nothing more important than his announcement of his early wedding with Miss Decker, and that he would not discuss the new aspect of the Barlow murder, the reporters reluctantly left Cuckoo's Nest.

Hardly had they departed when Bertram bustled in upon the lovers. The old lawyer appeared to have shaken ten years from his shoulders during the last twenty-four hours; and he had regained his self-confidence.

"I've just come from settling with Yarrow & Hart," he said, pursing his lips as if he tasted something bitter. "They're robbers, Adams, boldfaced, unscrupulous robbers! Why, the check I gave them——"

"How are they taking their sudden prosperity?" asked Adams.

Bertram chuckled and mopped his glistening forehead.

"They're quarreling like two dogs over a bone. Now that they're 'made,' as Hart terms it, they must enlarge their business facilities. They've already spoken for additional office space—apparently they agreed on that. But they've locked horns over their office force. Yarrow insists it shall consist of a 'classy' stenographer, about eighteen, and as blonde as they make 'em; while Hart is equally as determined on a smart boy in a blue suit and brass buttons, with the firm's monogram on the buttons!"

Bertram did not join in the laughter that followed. Instead he pursed his lips distastefully and nervously twisted his handkerchief.

"I hoped you could laugh at that," he said gravely, "for I've bad news also. Campbell's dead!"

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"Oh!" exclaimed Ann, frightened without knowing why.

"Suicide," muttered Adams.

"Yes—suicide," assented Bertram. Some subtle poison he'd hidden—the doctors don't exactly know yet."

"I'm so sorry!" sobbed Ann. "I did hope he'd get free."

Adams and Bertram exchanged covert glances, ashamed to show the relief they felt, and the old lawyer continued—

"Under the circumstances, Ann, don't you think you'd better reconsider your decision to give up all your father's interests in the estate?"

"I can't!" wailed the girl. "Oh, Mr. Bertram! I can't be forced to take any of it, can I?"

"No!" was the reluctant admission. "But I should advise you to talk it over with your husband-to-be."

"Ann and I feel just the same about that blood-tainted money," said Adams decisively, as he took the sobbing girl in his arms. "Turn it over to charity, Bertram, if there's no other way."

"That won't be necessary," sighed Bertram. Campbell has distant heirs, I understand. So don't let the money worry you, my dear. I think I'm safe in saying the estate will remain in probate for at least a generation."

Adams bent to kiss his promised wife.

"We'll leave the worry to the lawyers, sweetheart. Meanwhile, we'll be making our own little nest."

THE PINCHER CREEK BUNCH

BY ED L. CARSON

THREE men up before the colonel, three Canadian volunteers
Who had broken regulations after taking sundry beers;
Colonel looks them over gravely with a frown upon his brow
Well he knows them, hear him asking, "What have you been doing now?"
Charge is insubordination, insolence and other things,
Said they'd done so much saluting they must wear their arms in slings,
Cussed a corporal, sassed a sergeant, called a captain "Copper-beak,"
Back to duty, reprimanded, three hard men from Pincher Creek.

Three men on a scouting party watching closely from the grass
Part of Deleray's commando working over to the pass.
Logan turns to Jones and Wiggins with a slight sardonic smile:
"Never do to let them make it; better hold them here awhile.
They can get our boys from ambush when behind the rocks they creep,
Then there's simply nothing to it, they can kill them off like sheep."
Few and short their preparations, few and short the words they speak,
Three men standing off a hundred, three grim men from Pincher Creek.

Three men lying on a kopje with their faces to the sky
While their bullet-mangled bodies show how hard it was to die.
Side by side lay Jones and Wiggins, first to fall, so it appears,
Logan lay a little from them by three empty bandoliers.
Captain of the force that found them needs a single glance to see
What they sacrificed in saving his entire company:
"Hats off boys, these men were heroes," while a tear rolls down his cheek,
"Lay to rest with every honor three brave men from Pincher Creek."

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THE PEARL

by J. ALLAN DUNN

Author of "The Island of the Dead," "Beyond the Rim," etc.

TO SIT on the coral grit between lagoon and pandanus scrub and, with Hope beside you, open shell after shell with the possibility that the slimy morsels of meat may encase a fortune, is one of the pleasantest and cheapest forms of gambling, save perhaps when you are in urgent need of money. Then Necessity somewhat discounts Pleasure.

Ray Griffen needed the money. Rose Benoit had put it up to him straight. He was not the only one who was smitten with the petulant charm of the daughter of the Taromanga trader.

To begin with, she was the only white girl in the Southern Paumotus of marriageable age. She was spoiled, but she was so pretty that the fame of her had spread even to Tahiti. But Benoit, although he petted her, would not give her the one thing she most desired—liberty—and she had promised to run away with Griffen, provided that he could show her the tangible, visible means of supporting her in that state of life to which Rose believed her looks entitled her. She had given him a week. Six days of it were gone already and it would take him nearly half a day to get back to Taromanga in his weather-beaten whaleboat.

"You had better hurry back, *cheri*," she had spurred him. "There are others and I do not like to wait."

Girls, white or brown, develop speedily in the South Seas. "A bud one night, ripe fruit the next morning," says the Paumotu proverb. Rose was seventeen and she wanted to be married. She liked Griffen the best, she had decided, but Griffen had only his fourth-hand whaleboat and a very scanty credit standing between him and the South Sea synonym for hobo, which is beach-comber. When he had come to her with mysterious talk of a fortune that he could gather within a few days, perhaps a few hours, she had given him the week he asked for.

Griffen, looking at the pile of shells, stacked carefully to leeward of him to offset the smell of their rotting, was beginning to think he had come on a fool's errand. Old Kawea, with his bleary diver's eyes, had professed a great admiration for Griffen and, now that he could only sit in the sun and mumble reminiscences no one listened to, he announced himself willing to tell the whereabouts of a virgin atoll where shell was thick—for a consideration.

That consideration had strained Griffen's credit to the breaking point. Benoit had bluntly told him so. Five dozen cans of salmon, thirty sticks of twist tobacco and a case of gin was the price of Kawea's secret.

Untouched coral islets are rare, even in the Low Archipelago and, under ordinary cir-

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cumstances, Griffen would have wondered why Kawea himself had not exploited the lagoon. But he needed the money, or rather he told himself that he could not live without Rose, so he clutched at the straw.

He had more than a suspicion he was poaching. The atoll was one of a cluster ruled over by Tamatau, an autocratic native chieftain, but it was on the outer fringe of the dusky monarch's dominion and Griffen took a chance, being a firm believer in the white man's motto of "findings—keepings." There were no *tabu* signs posted and it might not be Tamatau's lagoon.

He extracted an irregular scrap of pearl, a practically worthless *baroque* and tossed it into the tobacco tin a quarter full of the same low-value gems. Even the tide was against him. As soon as it turned to ebb he would have to hoist his patched leg-of-mutton sail in order to get back within the limit. He had less than three hours to achieve fortune.

He took up a wrinkled shell. It was heavily ridged and looked as if it might house a sick oyster. He ran his knife blade between the stony lips and levered them apart, inserting a groping finger and thumb. They encountered a hard spherical substance and his heart pounded heavily.

It was a pink pearl, perfect in shape, fuzzy with luster like the down of a peach. He held it in the grimy hollow of his hand, appraising its weight and value. It was close to fifteen carats. Leon Waroneck, the Pearl King of Tahiti, had taken one like it out of the Mangai lagoon that had been valued by the experts at sixty thousand dollars.

He felt dizzy for a minute. He could see no limit to sixty thousand dollars. Rose doubtless would know how to spend it. They would go to the coast and have a honeymoon that would set all Polynesia talking. Then he would build a big house and buy a fast launch and a trading schooner and they would live like lord and lady.

The atoll was shaped like a figure eight. The coral insects had raised two roughly circular rings that joined circumferences where a channel made free passage between the two lagoons. The sea entrance was in the outer basin; the shell lay only in the inner. Coco-palms and pandanus-brush fringed the low margins.

Griffen's whaleboat was beached in the seaward lagoon. Opening his oysters, he had not noticed the arrival of a small sloop from which a man had cautiously paddled ashore in the dingey that had trailed at its stern on the trip from Taromanga. As Griffen turned the pearl slowly between thumb and finger the man padded over the sand toward him, his lengthy, sunset shadow well away from the man he was stalking.

The newcomer was dressed in white trousers and a singlet with a hat of native weave on his sunburned head. A revolver swung in a sheath holster from his belt, and about his neck was a wreath of white ginger blossoms.

It was the perfume of the flowers that made Griffen turn his head, then thrust the pearl deep into his trousers pocket and start to rise.

"Don't get up, Ray, I spotted the pearl. Hand it over."

Renaud smiled as he spoke, but his dark eyes were menacing. He was a good-looking chap, and once he and Griffen had been good friends before Rose Benoit came back from the California convent. Of late there was little love lost between them. Pierre Renaud was Griffen's closest rival for the favor of the girl and the latter had been convinced at times that Pierre was the more acceptable suitor. He had a trim sloop against Ray's apology for a seaworthy craft. He had plenty of credit at the store, and he owned a copra grove, all of which meant the wherewithal for trinkets to set off Rose's comeliness.

But now, with a fortune concentrated in the size of a marble in his pocket, Griffen restrained the blow and felt he could afford to answer with a laugh.

"What do you mean, hand it over?"

"It's mine," retorted the other. "Kawea got drunk on the gin you were fool enough to give him. And he talked. I've leased this atoll from Tamatau. Paid him hard cash for it. The lease dates back to the first of the month. You sailed on the fifth. Come across with the pearl, *mon ami*. I'll pay you for your time and the regular commission, though there is no real reason why I should."

The thing was possible. Tamatau might have given a lease. But to give up the pearl—and Rose! Griffen's face went red as his hair.

"I'll see you damned first," he said. "I found it, and I'm going to keep it. I'm

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going to sell it to the Waroneck syndicate."

"And marry Rose and live happy ever after. You're wrong. It is *I* who shall sell it to the syndicate and live happy ever after—with Rose. You would, would you? Stay where you are, —— you!"

The muzzle of his revolver menaced Griffen unwaveringly, his finger ready on the trigger, his leering, triumphant face behind the weapon.

"Rose is with me on the sloop with her mother. After they have seen the pearl, we shall sail to Tahiti and sell it. Then we shall get married and go to——"

Griffen was squatting on the sand, supported by his arms. His fingers sank slowly into the grit. Suddenly he uptossed a hand, sending the coral grains straight into Renaud's face as he scrambled upwards, clutching for the barrel of the weapon.

Renaud pulled trigger and the bullet spurted into the sand. The next moment they were rolling over the beach in a deadly embrace, fighting for possession of the pistol. The Frenchman wrenched it free and fired again. The barrel was choked with sand, and the cartridge failed to explode.

Griffen's fist smashed into Renaud's face and the latter struck downward viciously. The heavy weapon hit Griffen on the temple and he collapsed limply on the sand.

His face livid, Renaud wiped the smarting grit from his eyes, knelt and took the pearl from the pocket of the senseless Griffen. A trickle of crimson was oozing from Griffen's head and making a little puddle in the sand.

Renaud nursed his bruised cheek for a moment before he picked up the tin tobacco can holding the *baroques* and some seed pearls. These he scattered contemptuously over the coral. The pearl he examined with a grin of triumph. Then without a second look at his unconscious rival, he returned to the seaward lagoon, dragged Griffen's whaleboat to the edge of the water, smashed in its teredo-eaten planks with a block of coral, attached its painter to the stern of the dingey and towed the whaleboat into the lagoon. As the broken craft began to settle, he severed the rope and watched it sink to the bottom before he rowed back to his sloop where a slim figure waved a hand to him from the cockpit.

WHEN Griffen regained consciousness, he lay on his back looking up at the stars for a minute before he remembered what had happened. Then he cursed softly, raised his throbbing head and looked about him. The water was nearly to his feet. There was no margin of wet sand. The tide was still flooding. Until it turned to the ebb no vessel could get through the outer reef against the swift current. Renaud was still there, with Rose.

He bowled some water in his hand and applied it to his wound. The drops fell through his fingers in splashes of liquid fire, replete with phosphorescence.

His fists balled themselves as he stood upright and his wrath mounted with every heart-beat. To be robbed of a fortune and the girl he loved at the same fell turn of the wheel was too much. And both were still within reach.

He went down on the margin of the lapping ripples and calculated the odds. Renaud held ace high with his revolver—unless he had forgotten to clean it. Even then it might be possible to paddle off to the sloop and surprise them. The sound of a guitar came faintly to him as he walked over to the brush and stood peering at the black outline of Renaud's sloop.

He wondered whether Rose knew that he was there, that Renaud had mastered him and taken away the pearl from its finder. Madame Benoit would be in the cabin, a sleepy chaperon, and Rose would be with Renaud in the cockpit, playing to him and singing langurous *chansons*.

He crept out of the shadow and swore up at the stars with the discovery that his boat was gone. The odds were against him. The seaward lagoon was dangerous at the flood. A shark was almost certain to be ranging after mullet. At the ebb the sea-tiger would leave, but so would the sloop. His rage chilled at the thought of the desperate chance he must take in swimming off, and his racing blood hung stagnant in his veins.

Yet, unless he took the hazard, he was condemned to be marooned on the lonely atoll, perhaps for a month, year even, while Renaud and Rose . . .

Beyond the sloop a tremulous radiance proclaimed the rising of the moon. In fifteen minutes its light would render him visible to a casual glance from the sloop,

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and a bullet from Renaud's revolver might accomplish what a shark, sated with mullet, might ignore.

There was not an ounce of cowardice in Griffen's make-up. His lean jaw grew rigid as he dwelt upon the trick that had been played him. He went back slowly to his pile of shells, swore for the third time as he saw the overturned, empty tobacco tin, and groped for a flask that he had hidden under a pile of seaweed for coolness. He took a long draft of the brandy it contained and tossed the empty container into the lagoon. A streak of blue flame pyramided as it struck the water. He ripped the seams of his trousers with his knife and rolled the garment half way up to his thighs, tucking the blade into his belt.

Then he waded slowly into the water of the outer lagoon, a splendid figure, lean and long-muscled, hardly visible in the dusk. He shivered a little despite the brandy at the thought of the cold-eyed, sharp-fanged brute that might be waiting for him in the star-sprinkled water.

As he struck out, softly but sturdily, globules of fire, the color of burning alcohol, dripped back to the surface from his uplifted arms. Shafts of light streaked out in the wake of the powerful scirrors-clip of his legs. The telltale phosphorescence accented his peril and he strained his eyes for the fin of a shark.

Ahead, the lagoon was clear to the murk of the sloop and he swam steadily on. The bows of the little vessel, swung by the tide, faced the lagoon entrance. From the stern the tinkle of the guitar sounded plainly. He could hear the light laughter of Rose and the deeper answer of Renaud's voice. Then they started to sing in harmony.

A blossom drifted against his face. It was a ginger flower from Renaud's wreath. The perfume of it sickened him and he felt a sudden revulsion against the girl. The pearl—or what the pearl represented in pleasure and clothes—was all she cared for. Despite the danger, he dived and swam under water. It was his pearl and he meant to have it. Unless they happened to look directly toward him there was little danger of his being observed.

He decided to swim round to the bows and haul himself up by the bobstay. Renaud had his mainsail hoisted, peak down, in readiness to sail at the turn of the tide. That would act as a cover to him once he gained the deck.

When he came to the surface to ease his aching lungs the moon-radiance was stronger. The rise was imminent and its coming likely to stir the lovers to action. It was hard work, swimming against the tide, but already he could feel its influence lessening. In a few minutes everything would be decided.

He turned to swim upon his left side and caught sight of something that momentarily paralyzed his limbs. Midway between him and the curving shore, luminous ripples trailed from the dorsal fin and upper tail-lobe of a shark.

Griffen was a powerful swimmer, as near an approach to a native as a white man may be. He knew what to do—he had often seen the islanders fight sharks in the traps but he had never tried it himself. And those combats had been in broad daylight.

The sinister portent approached him leisurely. The great fish had so far neither scented nor seen him. His nerves tautened as he awaited the possible attack, one arm with outstretched hand balancing him, ready to dodge and dive, the other clutching his knife. Every movement must be timed to the shade of a second in this grisly game of tag that could be ended in his favor only by gaining the right position to drive the steel into the monster's belly and let the impetus of the shark rip itself open from gills to anal fin. Otherwise—he felt in imagination the crunch and tear of the bristling maw, the drag to some cave in the reef or the open sea, the suffocation!

The fins were only fifty feet away. The combat could not be avoided. It would have to be under water. There the phosphorescence that betrayed him would also show every motion of the shark.

The brute was close upon him, sinking slowly, trailing a green veil of aqueous smoke. With the crisis upon him he lost all sense of fear, brain and limbs coordinating and an unusual clearness and confidence possessing him.

He took a breath that filled his lungs, already well exercised by the swim, and struck downward, legs and arms playing like fins from his trunk, perfectly poised, awaiting the attack. The vague shape grew clearer, turning in a swirl of luminiferous disturbance as if it emitted a ghostly radiance of its own.

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With sudden thrusts Griffen forged past the vast bulk, past the green, greedy eyes, the open mouth and gaping gill-slits, beneath, under and up to the surface and the welcome air as the selachian slowly rolled to a biting position. He had not been close enough to use his knife. Swiftly he replenished the reservoir of his lungs and dived again with the singing from the sloop the last sound in his ears.

Up from the depths to meet him glowed the shark. He could distinguish the eyes back of the pointed snout, the streaks of light that radiated from its fins as it rolled over once more to snatch him. He swam down desperately until his chest seemed rending apart and he was blind and dizzy, though his will still forced him on to meet the issue.

With a final effort he got below the beast as it lashed out with its tail and lunged toward him. His skin scraped against the roughly pebbled hide, and then the sharp blade went home. He held it against the resistance for a few desperate seconds while the leathery skin split apart and the bowels of the cold-blooded sea-tiger dropped through the rent. Then he shot up for air.

The shark rose with him, thrashing the water, maimed but not dead, swimming in its own blood, furious at the taste of it, not knowing its source, unable to locate its assailant.

Griffen swallowed the fresh night air in great gulps. He heard voices from the cockpit, apparently attracted by the struggling shark that whipped the surface into a cauldron of liquid fire and then sank slowly.

He dived once more and came up alongside the hull, his fingers touching the fast-growing tropic ship-growth of shell and weed. As he swam below the bobstay, the yellow moon lifted, turning his dripping figure to silver while he silently swung himself to the bowsprit, to crouch there, gasping from his efforts and trying to control silence. The singing started again, Renaud's tenor vibrant against the girl's accompaniment.

Griffen had a fair knowledge of French but the amorous accents could have told him the nature of the love song.

"Beautiful enchantress!" Renaud was singing. That was Rose. Did she know he was on the island? He had not told her he was going. Idiot that he was, he had not told anybody. Only Kawea knew, and he had babbled. One thing was certain, the girl's affection would go with the pearl. The stress of the last few hours had cleared his perception of her. He saw her for what she was, pretty, vain, frivolous and utterly selfish. Yet, as he peered between mast and canvas, jealousy attacked him as he saw Rose lay aside her guitar and, with a glance toward the cabin, surrender herself to Renaud's arms.

The perfume of crushed ginger blossoms came again to Griffen. His anger was against Renaud, the double robber, and he gripped the stays to restrain himself for the moment. He had caught the glint of Renaud's revolver lying on the thwart. His knife was in the lagoon. He forced himself to wait until the pair turned their backs to him.

Rose began to speak in the cooing voice that he had once thought the outward and audible sign of her angelic disposition. Now he realized that it had nothing more to do with her makeup than the ribbon in her hair. It was just part of the bait she used for angling.

"How soon do we start back, Pierre? You told mother we'd be back before ten o'clock. She'll be furious when she wakes up."

"I didn't calculate on our missing a tide. She'll forgive us when she sees the pearl. Let's not go back to Taromanga. Let us go to Tahiti where we can sell the pearl and get married right away. Then we can go to San Francisco by steamer and your mother can return and break the news to Father Benoit."

She snuggled up to him.

"Wasn't it wonderful, your finding the pearl so quickly, Pierre? I thought it would take weeks to go through the shell. But to find it on just a first trip like this, it was wonderful. Let me see it again now the moon is up."

Renaud took it from his pocket and gave it to her. It looked as big as a walnut between her little fingers. She stroked it gently, twisting it to admire it's irridescence in the radiance of the fully lifted moon. Griffen's mood involuntarily softened toward her. She did not know that he had been on the island. Renaud had not told her.

"Oh, but it is beautiful!" she sighed. "I should like to wear it."

"It will buy you plenty of beautiful

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things to wear, little one," answered Renaud. "It will take you a long time to spend what that is worth."

"How much?"

"Fifty thousand dollars, perhaps."

"Fifty thousand dollars!" She sighed ecstatically. Then she put her arms about his neck, still holding the pearl in her palm. "I love you, Pierre."

"Me—or the pearl?"

She drew back from him.

"How can you be so horrid?"

"How about Ray Griffen?"

"Griffen! What made you think of him? Now you are ridiculous and I do not love you at all."

"Suppose Griffen had found the pearl. Would you still love me the best."

She looked at him with a *moue,* then, as she caught the intensity of his voice, her face hardened a little.

"Perhaps," she said.

RENAUD released himself from her arms.

"Give me the pearl," he said. "The tide's slacking. We'll be getting out of this. It's my pearl and it's worth the love that many girls would trade for it. I'm no fool, Rose. I want you, but I want all of you. It's a case of love my pearl, love me, my girl. Give it to me."

"Ah, Pierre, I was only joking."

She stretched out her arm with the gem cupped in her hand as Griffen leaped down into the cockpit and snatched it with one hand while he dealt Renaud a blow that sent him staggering against the wheel. The next second he had caught up the pistol as the girl shrieked.

"Turned the tables, Renaud," he said grimly. "It's your turn to stay put. If you move a muscle I'll blow the top of your head off, or if the gun's choked I'll beat your skull in, you dirty thief."

Renaud cringed against the wheel, his mouth open in astonishment at the sudden reversal. There was a sound in the cabin and Madame Benoit started heavily up the companionway, rubbing sleepy eyes. Rose retreated to the rail, her eyes shining with excitement.

The storekeeper's wife gasped at the scene.

"What does all this mean?" she asked. "You, Renaud, speak. You bring me on a little pleasure trip as chaperon for Rose to see some of your property. Behold then, now it is night. What will Monsieur Benoit say to this? And you," she turned to Griffen excitedly, "why do you come aboard with a pistol, talking of thieves?"

"Kawea told me of this island," said Griffen doggedly. "I paid him for the secret. The fool got drunk and talked to Renaud. He came across me on the beach there and tried to shoot me. He nearly killed me as it was and took the pearl I had just discovered. Then he left me to die, for all he cared."

"Ah!" Madame Benoit drew in her breath sharply. "So. He told us he would go ashore for fresh nuts, that there was no time for us to land. And he stole the pearl from you."

"But I have taken it again," said Griffen in his halting French. "I swam off to the sloop and on my way I killed a shark. I would have killed him, too, if it was necessary."

Rose came a step from the rail, her lips parted.

Renaud found his voice.

"It is false," he said. "The pearl is mine. I hold the lease from Tamatau. Griffen is a poacher. I have the lease with me. I could have him arrested but I took it from him in fair fight. He had his knife."

The girl turned once more toward Renaud.

"Show me the lease," she said.

"No. I will show you nothing. But the pearl is mine. I shall do what I please with it. This is my boat. Griffen, give me the pearl."

"Come and take it."

Suddenly the girl crouched and flung herself upon Griffen from behind like a tigress. Renaud started into action simultaneously, swinging to the arm that held the pistol. Rose had clutched the hand that held the pearl. With furious strength she bent Griffen's arm upward in the unexpectedness of her onslaught.

"Quick, Pierre," she cried. "Get the pistol. I have the pearl."

Her head darted forward and her white teeth met in the side of Griffen's palm.

His hand flew open with the pain as he tore his arm free. The pearl dropped to the thwart and rebounded, springing up with a soft gleam of rosy fire.

Madame Benoit shrieked and Rose flung herself forward as the two men gazed in fearful fascination. Before the girl could

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reach it, the pearl hit the gunwale and rebounded, hopping high and falling beyond the rail, striking the water with a tiny splash and sinking swiftly through twenty fathoms to the ooze.

Rose, sobbing, shrank to a crouch beside her mother, her face hidden in her hands.

"There goes fifty thousand dollars," said Griffen with a calmness that amazed himself.

Renaud shrugged his shoulders. Then he laughed.

"There goes your trousseau, Rose," he said. "And all the rest of the pretty things."

She raised her head and looked at both of them.

"I hate you," she said in a whisper that mounted to a high pitch as she hysterically reiterated her statement. "I hate you both. Hate you. *Hate you!*"

Her mother forced her into the cabin. Renaud turned to Griffen.

"That seems to let us both out," he said. "No use for us to go on hating each other, is there?"

"I fancy we've got off cheap, at that," said Griffen. "I found the pearl, you owned it, I suppose——"

"And the girl lost it and that's the end of it. I destroyed your whaleboat Griffen. Let me give you a trip home. And, if you care to consider it, I need some one to handle the sloop as trader, on shares of course. What do you say to it?"

Griffen glanced toward the cabin where Madame Benoit was trying to console her hysterical daughter.

"We can talk it over on deck as we go back," said Renaud.

Griffen held out his hand.

"I need the job," he said frankly. "I shouldn't wonder if we got along first-rate after this. The tide's running. I'll get in the hook."

IN FULL of ACCOUNT

by HAPSBURG LIEBE

Author of "The Man-Breaker," "The One Way Out," etc.

HIS mountaineer father, one of the last of his name, had died with a hot rifle in his hands and with knee-high boots on his feet. His stepmother, a young and somewhat slatternly lowlander, was getting ready to go away and leave him to the mercies of the neighbors. She had told some of the mountain women only the day before that she wasn't going to have that Biddleshaw brat tagging around after her and spoiling her chances of another marriage—he was no child of hers, was he? He was not! She owed him nothing, she said. If his father had no people in the Caney River country to care for him, it wasn't her fault, was it? It certainly was not!

"Good-by, Little Tom," she smiled as she

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passed out by the front doorway of the old cabin in Copperhead Cove.

Little Tom was sitting on the door-step.

"The same to you, madam," he replied very sourly, "and may the Old Scratch camp on yore trail!"

The boy was not more than twelve, but already one could see signs of the fighting Biddleshaw blood in him—a blood that had fought itself almost to extinction. Already he had whipped several boys whose voices had changed, and not once had he carried a whipping himself. He had killed, with his bare hands, a cat that had killed a wood-thrush. It was a fashion of his to declare, on occasion, that the Biddleshaws bent their knees only to the Almighty. His father, Big Tom Biddleshaw, had been fond of saying that, and he had lived up to it religiously.

WHEN the departing lowlander woman had disappeared around the bend in the path that led down the river, Little Tom went up through the blooming laurels of the western mountain-side to where his sire lay sleeping his last sleep with his boots still on. He knelt there beside the slaty mound, this bare-footed and tow-headed lad in ragged jeans and threadbare blue denim, with his heart breaking with loneliness.

"She's done went and left us, pap," he said aloud; and a near-by wood-thrush replied with a sudden, short burst of song. "I don't know what we're agoin' to do now, pap; be durned ef I do. It was a mighty mean way to do a boy like us, now wasn't it! But I reckon she wasn't no 'count, nohow."

And then he sat down and cried, Biddleshaw that he was. He hated being a beller-box, but he just couldn't help it.

Old Granny Porter, the mother of the neighborhood, was waiting for him when he walked slowly back to the old log house that had been his home since he could remember.

"Hi, grannywoman," said the boy. "Je hear about pap's lowdown wife a-leavin' me here alone all by myself?"

"I seed her agoin', sonny," said Granny Porter. She adjusted the red bandanna she wore about her white head and looked over the brass rims of her glasses. "Je know what ye're agoin' to do, sonny?"

"Hain't had much time to think about it."

"Ye're agoin' down to my house, that's what ye're agoin' to do, sonny," declared the old woman. "I'm agoin' to keep ye ontel ye can find some place to go. I allus loved ye, Little Tom."

"Me you too," said Big Tom Biddleshaw's boy.

"How much?" smiled Granny Porter.

"As much as any dawg I ever had, or mucher," seriously.

So Little Tom Biddleshaw went with Granny Porter down to the Porter cabin, and he carried with him all that seemed worth taking from his old home: It was his father's repeating rifle, and its black walnut stock bore several deep notches which Big Tom Biddleshaw had cut there in the good old-fashioned, romantic way.

The Porter cabin set at the mouth of a small, cleared cove. There were many blooming touch-me-nots, zinnias and marigolds in the narrow yard, and a green gourd vine ran up each of the front porch's four rustic columns. Half a dozen cane fishing-rods stood leaning against the huge stone-and-clay chimney. A long-eared and spotted hound lay dozing beside the door-step.

Granny Porter's son and daughter, a big and sunburned young man in laced boots and corduroys, and a pretty young woman in blue calico, came out.

Jim Porter frowned when he saw the Biddleshaw boy. His mother read his thoughts instantly. Jim was the sole provider for the household. Times were hard, because the logging-camps were not working.

"Do ye keer ef we keep him ontel he can find some place to stay?" asked Granny Porter.

"Ef we keep him a little while, we'll keep him for good," drawled the big and sunburned young man, dropping to a home-made chair on the porch. "It's a shore thing 'at you'll fall in love with him, mother, ye know. I'd like to take him, y'onderstand, mother; but I'm a figgerin' on gittin' married purty soon, and I'll have all I can rightly take keer of 'thout him."

Little Tom straightened proudly.

"You don't haf to keep me!" he stormed furiously. "Ef I was as big as you, Jim Porter, I'd beat yore fool head off right now!"

Porter laughed delightedly. The boy had shown a spirit that had won his whole heart in a second's time. Jim Porter him-

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self was considered one of the finest fighting men in the Caney River country.

"Jest like his daddy!" said Porter. "Sonny, as long as the's one board left on the ruf, it's thar to kiver you; and as long as the's a bistick in the house, it's for you to eat. Make yeself at home. You're our'n, from this minute ontel ye kick open the door o' death."

"I'll pay ye back," replied Big Tom Biddleshaw's boy. "My people allus paid their debts, and I'll pay you."

"Forgit it!" grinned Porter.

"Forgit——!" cried Little Tom. "I don't never forgit nothin'. Gi' me sumptin' t'eat, for goodness sake. A skillet o' gravy to sop, or sumpin'. I hain't e't nothin' hardly this whole week. All the grub that lowdown wife o' pap's cooked was mostly for herself, and I had to eat the leavin's, like a durned dawg. I hate a cussed, lowdown lowlander."

TIME ran on. The laurel bloom faded and dropped off, and the leaves of the trees began to turn brown from the bite of the early frosts, and the chestnuts began to fall. With the coming of Autumn, Jim Porter took on a manner of deepest melancholy; he never laughed any more, and he seldom even smiled. When one spoke to him, one was usually ignored. This moroseness was a source of constant irritation to the boy, who had come to worship Jim. Little Tom couldn't understand it at all, and Jim positively wouldn't explain.

The truth of the matter was that Jim's girl had broken her engagement with him. Angie Lee was her name. She had listened to the smooth and falsifying tongue of Andy McHenry, a lowlander who tried to pass himself off as a native-born mountain man.

McHenry had told Angie that Porter had said that he wanted to break off with her, and hated to do it because she was such a nice girl. And now Angie Lee was so genuinely mad at Jim Porter that she was about to marry the lowlander for pure spite! Angie had as much fine, high-strung hill pride as anybody else ever had.

Little Tom sat cross-legged on the new-ground fence, with his father's rifle lying in the hollow of his arm. The leaves were so dry and crackly that it was impossible to cat-foot after a squirrel. Soon Jim Porter happened along, and he didn't see the boy at first; his head was bent, and he was looking intently at something that lay in his open right hand. Little Tom bent forward slyly. That which Jim was eying so longingly was a lock of raven-black hair tied with a piece of pale blue ribbon.

Then Little Tom understood it all.

"Jim!" he grinned.

Porter stopped suddenly and faced the boy.

"Well?"

"So it's that woman, is it?"

"What have you got to do with it?" snapped Porter.

"Nothin'," quickly said Little Tom. "But no fool woman is wo'th it, Jim."

"Who'n tarmint are you a-callin' a fool woman?" demanded Porter.

"Needn't git yore back up like a spittin' 'coon's," smiled Little Tom. "I hain't afeard o' no man 'at walks on two laigs. Well, consarnin' who's a fool woman, stick this here in yore pipe and smoke it—any woman as would throw down as good a feller as you is a fool woman and a durned fool woman! Now what ye agoin' to do about that?"

"Spank ye—that's all," and Jim Porter moved toward the boy as if he meant to carry out his threat; then he found himself facing the muzzle of Big Tom Biddleshaw's rifle.

"Easy—go easy, Jimmy," warned Little Tom. "I'd die sixteen times for ye, Jimmy, but ye can't spank me. No Biddleshaw was ever spanked, Jimmy."

Porter smiled, shook his head, and went on homeward. Little Tom leaped to the ground and followed silently.

Before he had gone a hundred yards farther down the mountainside, Porter met the smooth-tongued lowlander, Andy McHenry, a heavily-built, reddish, blue-eyed man in cheap ready-made clothing. Little Tom slipped unobserved behind a stunted cedar to watch and to listen. He hated McHenry because McHenry was a lowlander.

"I've just come from Angie Lee," said the heavily-built man. "She sent me to you with these things."

He held out an imitation ivory fan, a cheap brooch, three cheap rings, and a hand-mirror in a silver-plated frame. They had been presents from Jim.

"I don't want 'em," replied Porter, and his face was white. "Take 'em back to

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Angie and tell her they hain't no property o' mine."

"But—" began the lowlander—and just then he saw that Big Tom Biddleshaw's rifle was staring him in the face. Little Tom Biddleshaw said to him this:

"Jim he don't want 'em. Take 'em back to Angie and tell her they hain't no property o' his'n. Git!"

"But——"

"Git!"

Andy McHenry turned white, then red. Then he went toward the cabin of old man Lee. Porter faced the boy.

"Be keerful with that gun, son," he said.

He walked off and left Little Tom standing there by the stunted cedar.

Big Tom Biddleshaw's boy had inherited a quick mind along with his fighting blood, and he immediately guessed that the lowlander had had something to do with the separating of Jim and Angie. He knew Angie, and he liked her; she was a slim, roundish girl with brown eyes and thick black hair that hung below her waistline in a single plait.

After a few minutes of hard thinking, Little Tom set out at a rapid walk for Angie's home.

McHenry and the girl were sitting in home-made chairs on the honeysuckle-covered porch when Little Tom reached the gate. Neither of the two saw the boy, and he stopped and listened. The lowlander was asking Angie to marry him, and Angie seemed interested. Little Tom decided that it was time for him to act, and he went forward with rifle ready.

"Git!" he said, jabbing the weapon toward McHenry.

McHenry tried to laugh, rose, and obediently took his departure, which was not unwise.

"See you tomorrow, Angie!" he called over his shoulder.

"Don't be too shore!" muttered Little Tom Biddleshaw.

Then he went on the porch, put the rifle down, and dropped to the chair the lowlander had just left. Angie eyed him curiously.

"You'll hurt somebody with that gun some time, sonny," she finally predicted.

"What's a gun for, anyhow?" frowned Little Tom. "You shorely don't 'spect it's to wash yore teeth with, do ye, woman?"

Angie laughed.

"Who sent ye here," breathlessly, hopefully. "Jim?"

"Don't matter. What's atween you and Jim?"

"Jim," readily.

"That lowdown lowlander," said the boy, "he's lied about Jim to you, and you never give Jim no chanst to prove the lie. It's jest like a fool woman! What did Andy tell ye about Jim, Angie?"

Again Angie laughed. Then she became very sober.

"Andy told me that—that Jim said that he wanted to break off with me, and he hated to do it—because I was such a nice gyurl!" she blurted, on the verge of tears.

"Ahum! Ahum!" nodded Little Tom. "I knowed it! Why, madam, Jim has been plumb durned crazy ever sence ye throwed him! He cain't eat nor sleep, and he won't say nothin' at all when we talk to him, and he jest mopes around and looks at that thar lock o' yore hair like the' wasn't nothin' else in the world mattered. I told him no fool woman was wo'th it, and he ups and wants to spank me—*me*, a borned Biddleshaw, and what d'ye know about that!"

"Andy McHenry he swore Jim said it," murmured Angie.

"Andy McHenry he swore a lie," said Little Tom. "I allus did hate a cussed, lowdown lowlander. I'll tell Jim, and I bet ye forty red sticks o' candy ag'in nothin' 'at Jim he wallops Andy ontel his own mammy wouldn't know him from a side o' sole-leather."

He rose and took up the rifle that had notches on its black walnut stock. Angie rose too, and she stooped and kissed him on the forehead.

"Much obliged to ye, little boy!" she said; and Tom saw that she was about to cry.

"Aw, buck up, Angie," he told her. "Buck up, and be a man. Buck up stout. It'll all be all right. Goo'by!"

WHEN the boy reached the cabin that was home to him, the Porters were sitting down to the evening meal. Little Tom put the rifle in a corner, wet his face and hands and dried them on a coarse towel, sat down at his accustomed place at the table, and ran his left great toe into its accustomed knothole in the floor. He did not break the news he had until Jim had finished his supper, because he did not

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wish to spoil the meal for Jim. When he had unburdened his mind of its weight of information, Porter sprang erect and kicked his chair clean across the room and into the wide-mouthed stone fireplace.

"Much obliged, kid," said Jim, when he had cooled down a tenth of a degree. "You've done paid me back for everything now."

"Not yit," objected Little Tom, with half a pone of buttered corn-bread poised in one hand. "Not yit, Jimmy."

Porter put on his broad-rimmed black felt hat and strode toward the doorway.

"Whar ye a-goin', Jim?" called Granny Porter.

"I'll tell ye when I come back," said Jim; and he disappeared in the gathering dusk.

Little Tom took up another half pone of corn-bread, rose, and hastened after Porter.

"Whar ye a-goin', sonny?" asked the old woman.

"I jest got to see that fight, granny," said Little Tom; and he, too, disappeared in the gathering dusk.

They were gone for an hour, and it was a very long hour to Granny Porter and her daughter. When they returned, Jim's face and hands were bleeding, and his clothing was torn somewhat. Jim went straight to the wash-basin, and Little Tom went straight to Granny Porter.

"Y'ought 'o see McHenry, granny!" cried the boy. "Oh, but y'ought 'o see *him!* Jim he calls the lowlander out, and he says to him, says Jim: 'The Good Book, Andy,' he says, 'tells us that all liars shall have their po'tion in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; and, Andy,' says Jim, 'I'm goin' to give you yores right now! Haul off yore coat, Andy,' Jim he says, 'ef ye want it off!'

"And so Andy he hauls off his coat, and they goes at it. Did ye ever see two wild-cats fight, granny? They fit that away edzactly. I didn't think that cussed low-lander had it in him, by gyar! I'd stand and holler: 'Pour it to him, Jimmy—pour it to him, the skunk! Hit him in the eyes! Hit him in the nose! Hit him in the mouth!'

"And Jim he done it. When he got through with the lowlander, they had to tote him in the house thar whar he boards and put him to bed. And—Jim and Angie is agoin' to be married at ten o'clock in the mornin'! Jim he went to Angie atter the fight; he told her he couldn't stand it no longer, and Angie she said she shore couldn't neither, and they've done sent for a license and a preacher."

The following day dawned clear, save for a little pale blue haze that rose from distant mountain fires, and there was the snap of frost in the air. The three Porters, dressed in their best clothing, started for old man Lee's cabin at half-past nine. They would have taken Little Tom along, if they could have found him; the boy had mysteriously disappeared.

Angie, in a blue-dotted dress of percale, with real boughten shoes and stockings on her feet and with a new bow of pink ribbon at the end of her long, thick plait of black hair, was waiting impatiently.

Where the road ran between the points of two hills, the Porters halted suddenly. The keen sound of a rifle shot had come from a little way up in the laurels to their left.

"Wait here, you'uns," said Jim Porter, his face a sickly white. "I know that gun when I hear it. It allus makes me think o' the voice o' Big Tom Biddleshaw."

He hurried up through the laurels and toward a little cloud of rising powder smoke. Thirty yards from the road he came upon the dead body of Andy McHenry, which lay behind a stone the size of a barrel; and lying beside the lowlander's limp right hand was a cocked revolver—McHenry had been killed while in the act of waylaying him! Twenty yards farther up Jim Porter found Little Tom Biddleshaw sitting on the moss-covered trunk of a fallen tree.

"What have ye done, sonny?" cried Porter; though he well knew what the boy had done.

"Paid my debt to you, Jimmy," smiled Little Tom, unshaken, unperturbed. "The Biddleshaws allus paid their debts, Jimmy."

Then he took out his knife and cut another notch in the black walnut stock of his father's rifle, in the good old-fashioned, romantic way.

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The LONG HAIRED JANE

by

EDGAR YOUNG

Author of "The Yardstick."

BARNSY had only been working two days at Bananita when the "Long-Haired Jane" arrived. Ed Burke blew up the morning Barnsy blew in and old Pat Donovan gave him a "sine" as operator in the camp telegraph-car which went with the "front" outfit.

Bananita was not a town, as it might appear from its name, but merely a designated place on the profile, a wide place in the right-of-way, with a temporary siding to hold the outfit cars. Bananita was the end of steel and was pretty well up with the graders.

There were two reasons why Barnsy came to Bananita. One was that he had bees in his feet. The other was to lose himself from this same Long-Haired Jane. These two reasons operating together had caused him to hasten more rapidly than was his custom for the six months previous to his drifting into Bananita.

He had blown in, up, and out in this brief span on every Spiggotty pike south of Guaymas and there is a score of them, counting slim-gages and fruit roads. Ordinarily his manner of procedure was more leisurely. Had it not been for the second reason, it would have been at least a year from the time he left the Southern Pacific de Mex at Guaymas until he struck the construction of the Consolidated Fruit Company's road in Costa Rica. However, it is a matter of speculation just what conditions would have prevailed had he delayed his coming or where the front would have been when he arrived.

As it was, he did arrive when the front was at Bananita and went to work as telegraph operator there. Also we know that a couple of days later the Long-Haired Jane came and went to work as nurse in the hospital car.

The queerest part of it was that Barnsy had never spoken to her. Nor had she ever spoken to him. He had known her by sight as one of Mamacita's dance-hall girls in the Casa Piedra at Guaymas, where the Americans of the railroad spent quantities of both time and dollars. He also knew that a gambler named Flood, who owned the La Puerta del Sol, had nicked her the "Long-Haired Jane," a name by which she was known to all the Americans in the States of Sonora and Sinaloa.

Now it must not be inferred from this crude nickname that the long-haired Jane was other than beautiful. For beautiful she certainly was. She was Madonna-faced but this in itself was nothing. Most of Mamacita's girls were Madonna-faced and lazy-eyed. It was the something that men saw in the depths of her eyes that caused them to sigh and speak strangely. Also there was a quickness to her step, a buoyant ripple in her laugh, an intangible gripping lure about her personality that the other girls did not have.

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Furthermore it was known that she had no regular lover, either American or *pelao*, to lavish her money upon. Mamacita often grumbled at this. Not that she cared for the individual happiness of a mere girl, not she. A girl with money grew discontented. An ideal dance-hall, in Mamacita's estimation, was one in which each girl posessed a "fancy man" or "lover" to take every cent she earned and then, acme of perfection, a few swift-fingered tin-horns to take it away with dice or cards from these *padrotes*, or fancy gents, who as Flood once explained posed as gamblers but couldn't gamble enough to keep themselves warm

[illegible] blood. "Six- [illegible] in

sabe? That she caused men to squander their hard-earned money we well know. That she danced with them until they were intoxicated, more from her than from the wine they drank, is no doubt a fact.

A sinner perhaps she was as we all are not without sin. But whether she had ever committed the sin that caused her sister women to draw their skirts closer to them in the streets when they passed her, that was the greatest *quien sabe* in the city of Guaymas, the city of *quien sabes* in the republic of *quien sabes*. And, after all, that part of it does not have very much to do with this tale.

She was the Long-Haired Jane. No doubt it was the incongruity of this name rather than its fitness that caused it to [illegible]. Flood was sore when he called her [illegible] had pyramided upon her his [illegible] years in the La Puerta del [illegible] her. Yes, to win her [illegible]t spending.

[illegible] single-handed [illegible]de. A man [illegible]et rid of [illegible]he got [illegible]a del [illegible]final [illegible]r- [illegible]m [illegible]y

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jungle of interlocked trees, creepers and rioting vegetation, impassable without aid of ax or machete for more than a few paces.

It was already dark within the jungle and night life was beginning to arouse. A quickly smothered squeal told Barnsy that a puma had struck down a *conejo pintado* at a water-hole. A peccary squealed with pain as it was engulfed in the tightening coils of a python. A mile away could be heard the throaty roar of a bearded ape.

The jungle was telling its story, and Barnsy with the knowledge gained on tropical trails knew every word as it came to his ears. As he stood listening, he became aware that some one was watching him.

Turning suddenly, as if to enter the office, he glanced along the other outfit cars. Pastora was seated at a desk facing a screened window in the side of the hospital car. Quickly as he had turned, her eyes were not upon him when he looked, but gazing pensively into the darkening jungle.

Barnsy seated himself on the car steps and went over the matter for the hundredth time. When he had left Guaymas for Mazatlan he had not been surprised to see her. But in Guatemala City he had wondered at the coincidence of seeing her strolling in the plaza soon after he had arrived. Later in Puerto Cortez, Honduras, after meeting her on the street, he had gone to his room and pondered over the matter. Mexican girls he knew often followed lovers who jilted them, and often stabbed them too.

For reasons of his own he had avoided her when he danced in the Casa Piedra. For that matter he went there merely to dance. One woman was the same as another so long as she danced well, and Mamacita's girls were, as a rule, all good dancers. While men were flocking four deep around Pastora, he had claimed a dance with the first unoccupied girl.

Thus among all the Americans who came to the Casa Piedra in Guaymas, Barnsy was the only one who did not boast of an intimate or dancing acquaintance with her. It had seemed to him then that she had thrown chances in his way but he had failed to avail himself of them.

After quitting suddenly in Salvador, and seeing Pastora a day or so after he arrived in Managua, Nicaragua, the idea of coincidence left him. He knew then that she was following him and he partly guessed the reason why.

She had kept closely in the hospital cars since her arrival, so that the men scarcely knew of her presence, but he knew by some method or other she would know when he was about to leave and would know where he was going.

Barnsy smiled grimly.

"I wonder," he mused, "if I should tell her that her task is hopeless, if she would desist."

She was standing outside when he glanced in her direction. She quickly looked away. He saw that she had let her hair fall back and that it lay in luxuriant masses across her shoulders and fell in a glorious flood to her waist.

He arose and walked over to where she was standing.

"Señorita Pastora."

"Don Eugenio."

Barnsy cleared his throat.

"It seems, señorita, that you and I often happen to come to the same places for employment. Is it not strange?"

In the waning light she drew near and looked into his face for a long time before answering.

"No, it is not strange, Don Eugenio. I follow thee."

"But why, why do you follow?"

"I love you," she stated simply.

Barnsy placed his hand on her shoulders.

"Listen, girl," he began slowly, "so long ago that I do not care to remember, I loved a girl. She was beautiful, now that I stop to think of it, but I did not love her on that account. I think, but do not know, that she loved me in return. So we joined hands and swore oaths of love to each other. I was very young then.

"I went away from my home and parents to win the world for her and bring it back to lay at her feet. And I did not forget those vows we had sworn. I wrote her often and for a time she answered but after a while she ceased to write. I could not get a reply to my letters, so I wrote a friend asking if she had died. He wrote me that she had married—that she had married a man I remembered as a butcher in my home place. I thought he lied, so I went back, paying money for fare as long as it lasted and then traveling as best I could after it was gone. I found the friend who had written me and he showed me the very house the two lived in. Yet I did not believe. I must see with my own eyes.

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"At nightfall I crept into the yard. A light was shining from a window, and I looked and saw them. They were seated at the supper table. He was a gross, fat, mutton-headed man. A great meat pie stood between them on the table. Their plates were both heaped and they were eating. I went sick and staggered. It was with difficulty that I reached the side gate through which I had entered. Then I came away and I have never returned. Nor have I loved again. Nor shall I ever love again."

"Don Eugenio," she dropped the stilted third person and lapsed into the familiar second, "thou hast spoken thy heart, also thou hast spared me the blunt fact that I annoy thee. I am sorry that it is so. Would that it were otherwise. I know that thou wouldst have me out of thy sight, but I beg thee not to feel angry. I love thee. I, who have been loved by scores of men, now love a man who scorns me."

"And never shall I love thee, Pastora."

"Always shall I love thee, Don Eugenio. Nay, do not fear that I shall annoy thee. I shall never speak to thee, and in the future I shall try to keep out of thy sight, but I shall be nigh thee and the knowledge that thou art near will soothe a little my aching heart, *buenos noches* and *adios*."

She went within.

Barnsy stood for a long time pondering. He shook his head slowly and then sought his hammock inside the telegraph-car.

III

DURING the night Barnsy was aroused by a fusillade of shots. He sprang from his hammock and peered cautiously without. As he looked, flames began to spring up and in the light he saw armed men running back and forth. They were shouting:

"Down with the gringos! Kill the foreign dogs! *Matelos*."

Barnsy slipped hastily into his clothes. Grabbing his frontier model forty-five, he dashed outside. Just as he came out he saw Charlie Orender throw up his arms and drop. As he fell, a man ran up and began hacking the dying man with a machete.

Barnsy's gun spoke and the native dropped. Bill Jessee hobbled toward him. He saw old Pat Donovan emerge from his car, and as he threw up his arm to fire it dropped limply. Barnsy raised his voice and began to shout:

"This way, Americans! Gather here and we will make a stand!" And then added in Spanish when he saw the raiders wore the uniforms of soldiers. "Gather here, employees of the Consolidated Company who wish to stand with the Americans."

He attracted a hail of bullets that rattled against the side of the car. A soldier ran up close and dropped on his knee as he leveled his carbine upon Barnsy. The forty-five barked. The native toppled over. Another ran toward him and as he dropped on his knee to fire yet another wormed his way from beneath a car at his back and crept toward him with uplifted knife.

Jessee was unarmed but he sprang toward the man. His shattered foot crunched under his weight and he fell headlong. With a fiendish grin upon his face, the man started to sink the keen blade into Barnsy's back.

A small hand seized the wrist of the would-be assassin from behind. He half turned to look. There was the flash of another blade. The man's head dropped backward limply and blood gushed from his throat. Barnsy heard the gurgling cry as the man fell heavily, but did not know what had transpired. A woman flashed past him and ran into the face of the guns that were being trained on him.

"*Covárdes!* Cowards! Shoot me, *Cabrónes!*"

The firing ceased for a moment. She began to revile and mock them, daring them to kill her.

Barnsy shouted again for the Americans to gather around him to make a stand. The temporary lull in the firing gave them an opportunity to do this. They came running from both directions. A few of the timekeepers and other Costa Ricaños who held good positions joined with them, but most of the peon laborers had hidden from sight.

"Back! Back! Into the shelter of the jungle!" cried Pastora in English.

Barnsy had been born to lead. He gave the order to retire. Pastora flung a derisive laugh into the faces of the advancing soldiers and leaped to his side.

With their faces toward the belching carbines, the little party backed around the telegraph-car, emptying their revolvers

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as fast as they could pull triggers. John Carnes sighed and sank to his knees as a bullet plowed into his lungs. Barnsy reached for him and tucked him under his left arm. Several more cursed fervently as bullets found them.

When they reached the shelter of the jungle, the soldiers ceased firing. The Americans paused to decide upon what to do.

IV

THEY proceeded into the jungle a short way where they could watch developments without themselves being seen. The camp doctor went down on his knees and began bandaging the wounded. Sleeves had been ripped from shirts and every available piece of cloth was used to make temporary dressings.

Pastora returned before any one noticed that she had slipped away, with her apron filled with bottles of medicine from the hospital car which had not yet caught fire. She had not forgotten the doctor's tool kit, and he murmured his thanks as he began to operate in the darkness by sense of touch.

Pastora dropped beside him and began to assist him. Anesthetics were out of the question, and when a man gritted his teeth and groaned with the pain of probe or knife she stroked his forehead and babied him as men like to be babied when suffering. One by one the Costa Ricaños who had joined them slipped silently away into the jungle as they saw car after car of the camp take fire.

Barnsy was conferring with a camp fireman as to what was best to do. He looked closely at the uniforms of the raiders.

"It is a riddle to me," stated Barnsy. "They are government soldiers and officers, and this company is supposed to be in strong with the present government."

Pastora, kneeling beside the doctor, heard this and came over to them.

"When I went in the car to get the medicine I heard two peons talking. I heard one of them remark that it was because this country and the other Central American states and even Mexico were at war with your country."

Barnsy whistled softly. They were seventy-five miles in the interior of northern Costa Rica, three thousand miles from the Texas line, and five hundred miles, as a crow flies, from the Panama Canal Zone.

Barnsy walked into the cluster of men who huddled around the injured and the perspiring doctor. There were nine uninjured men and fifteen more or less seriously injured—and the woman, Pastora.

"How much quinine have you got, Doc?" he asked.

The doctor felt among the bottles until he felt a large wide-mouthed bottle.

"This bottle was about half full when I looked at it last."

"Is there enough there to last this party for ten days?"

The doctor calculated mentally.

"Yes, there ought to be enough to give each of us ten grains a day for that length of time."

"Then you think you can keep the fever stood off for ten days."

"Yes, as long as it's plain malaria and not Black Water, or Yellow Jack."

He pulled Barnsy's ear close to his mouth and whispered—

"These wounds I have dressed will be rotting with infection in a few days if I can't get them to a hospital."

"Fix me up my ration of quinine, Doc, for about a week. I'm going to hit the trail for Panama. I can't stop this side, for she says they're all at war with the U. S."

He raised his voice.

"Men," he said, "I'm going after help and medical assistance. These Spigs have grabbed our railroad and put it all over us in an unfair fight. We didn't come down here to fight. We came here to work, and we need some help. You fellows that are able better assist the wounded back about a mile or so into the jungle where you will be safe from the raiders who will stay to guard the railroad. You can't starve. There's bananas and yams, bread-fruit, nuts and other food that you can rustle easily. Don't take in any rubber nickels."

He plunged into the jungles toward the south. They heard the slash-slash of his machete for a few moments, and then Barnsy was gone.

"Where's my nurse?" asked the doctor suddenly. "She was here just a minute ago."

"Maybe she's deserted us and gone with the Spigs," volunteered old Pat Donovan rubbing his bandaged arm.

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But Pastora, the Long-Haired Jane, was in Barnsy's wake, straining her woman's heart to keep within hearing of his slashing machete.

THE ground beneath Barnsy's feet was soft and oozy, for the sun never penetrated to it. He fell into the easy trot of the tropical Indians, zigzagging around the larger trees as he ran. As the light of the burning camp died away to the rear, day began to dawn.

He passed through masses of rotting vegetation from which stifling stenches arose. Dense clouds of mosquitoes swarmed on him. He killed them literally by handfuls on face and neck.

As the day advanced the jungle began to teem with life. Monkeys screamed at him from the tree-tops. Bright-plumaged birds flitted from his path. A puma slunk across just ahead of him and crashed away as he gripped his revolver and started to fire. Small snakes and reptiles slipped from under his feet, seeking safety in flight. It was a veritable anarchy of life and nature.

Briers and saw-tooth grass tore his clothing and gashed his flesh. He floundered through marshes and sprang from hummock to hummock through swamps whose waters were inky black and whose trees were covered with parasites and hanging with festoons of vines. He swam sluggish, lily-covered rivers that were alive with alligators and reptiles.

By noon his face was so black and swollen from insect bites that his own mother would not have known him. His eyes were tiny slits.

He fed as he traveled, like a primitive, snatching edible fruit and nuts without pausing. He felt the fever from the mosquito bites burning in his blood. He drew out the quinine bottle and stared stupidly at it. It was empty. The cork had been lost out and the medicine had been washed away in the rivers. This meant that he would have to travel day and night if he reached Panama alive. Quinine for malaria is one of the only three sure cures known to the medical profession. The rest is experiment. In the tropics it is as essential as food or water.

As night approached the rain began to fall in a steady downpour. It was the first rain of the rainy season. For six months it would rain almost continuously. From twelve to twenty feet of water would fall from the heavens.

All through the night Barnsy stumbled forward. He threw off his two-thousand-year veneer of civilization. He became a savage, traveling by instincts that he never knew before he possessed. It was so dark he could not see, but he ducked his head from low-reaching snags that would have blinded him. He felt, he smelt, he knew his way without knowing why he knew. And he kept his face toward the south—toward Panama and the Canal Zone.

The next morning he was screaming with delirium. He shouted curses to the monkeys who shivered in the tree-tops. He sang snatches of Spanish and English songs. But above the delirium was the predominating thought "south—south!" He forgot why he was going south for hours at a time, but he knew it was south he must go and he forged forward.

On the third day infection had set in in each and every cut and laceration on his body. By that night each one was a yaw, or tropical sore, that was beginning to eat into his flesh. And each one was opened anew a hundred times a day from saw-grass and briers.

And the rain fell without ceasing. The slimy mud caught his feet and gripped them. He stumbled and floundered in it from ankle to hip deep. The strings of his shoes broke and he left them buried in the slime. He was glad for they had impeded him.

He laughed insanely. Why hadn't he thought of that before? He stripped off his coat and cast it aside. He must lighten down. The weight he was carrying was killing him.

His hand brushed against his revolver. He snatched it out and hurled it into space. He had gripped the machete so long that he could not release it. It seemed part of him, something that had grown in his hand and been there from birth.

On the fifth day he was burning alive with fever. He dived into pools and lay panting until he bethought himself of his slogan "south," when he arose and floundered ahead.

The yaws had spread until from head to foot he was one great bleeding sore. He yelled and screamed himself hoarse at contack with grass and bushes. On the after-

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noon of the fifth day his strength began to leave him. And no wonder. He had not had a minute's rest for centuries, not since he had been compelled to travel south.

He began to fall. But he got up again and headed south. These falling spells came more often, and he lay longer before he arose.

At last he lay quiet. He sobbed like an infant.

"I just can't go any further south. I've tried all I could but I'm all in, mister."

IV

"DON EUGENIO."

What was this creature that knelt over him? Was it human or beast or some shape conjured up from the phantasmagoria of his fevered brain? Its hair was matted and snarled into a great mane. Its face was a round black ball with tiny slits for eyes and mouth. It also was raw and bleeding.

Barnsy stared stupidly.

"*Chiquillo*, it is I—Pastora. I have followed as best I could, *chiquillo*."

Her soft voice called together Barnsy's scattered wits. He fell several times, regaining his feet.

"I must go south, Pastora. My mind has been wandering, but now I remember. I must get to the Zone."

"Whither thou goest I will go, *chiquillo*."

Hand in hand they stumbled forward. And they fell often from weakness. And her woman's love was stronger than the great strength of Barnsy, for she was first to rise and bid him travel. She thought not of herself but always of Barnsy, that she must get him to the hospital on the Zone. And more, when at last Barnsy could no longer rise, the blood of her burden-bearing Yaqui woman ancestors spoke down through her and bade her take up her burden and bear it.

So she staggered forward, with the man on her shoulders.

Though she fell often and lay a long time before arising, she at last stumbled into the Ancon Hospital gate at midnight of the eighth day, babbling to the doctors to give Barnsy a stimulant that he might speak the message that was on his lips.

Such was the love of Pastora, the *mestiza*, for Barnsy, my pal. And yet more. After the party had been rescued from the wilds of Costa Rica by a party organized by the Colonel, and Barnsy was able to walk again, he went to the woman's ward to visit her. She lay in her bed and smiled into his eyes the love that was in her soul. The nurses were American and he spoke to her in Spanish.

"Shall I send for the priest today?" he murmured.

"*Porquê*—why?"

"That he may make us one."

With her bandaged hands she reached for Barnsy's face and stroked it gently.

"Then thou wouldst marry me, by the church ceremony—I, Pastora de Gil, dance-girl, sinner, Long-Haired Jane?"

"Yes and by the ceremony of the law, *tambien*."

"It is not well. And thou shalt not do this thing, *chiquillo*. My name is upon the lips of men. They will not forget my past. Thou couldst not walk in honor among thy people if thou tookest me as a wife. It is better now that thou goest away, and always will I remember with gladness that thou offeredst to make marriage with me."

But Barnsy fell upon his knees beside the bed and swore that never would he be separated from her. He vowed his love for her in the ten thousand ways there are to vow love in the Spanish tongue. At last she took his face in her hands and gazed long and steadfastly into his eyes.

"Art thou sure, *chiquillo*, thou hast entirely forgotten the little girl who married the *carnecero?*"

Barnsy arose and hastened toward the telephone. A nurse who spoke Spanish noticed he was humming "*Celos*."

Sin celos no puede haber
Amor puro y verdadero,
Y á la mujer que yo quiero
Celos le pido tambien.

It means:

Without jealousy there cannot be
Pure and true love,
And I ask the woman that I love
To be jealous also.

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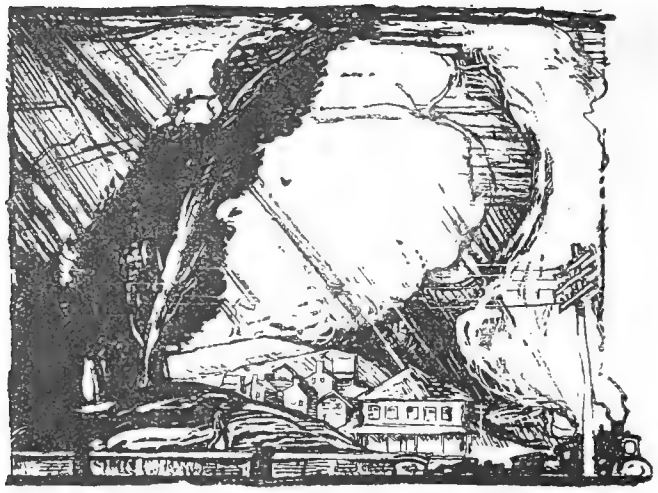

THE LAST WIRE

by RUSSELL A. BOGGS

Author of "The Pride of McNeal."

"SERIOUS news, this," remarked the Boomer.

He held up the newspaper as the brakeman rejoined him. It had been the brakeman's paper, he having handed it to the Boomer just before going forward to set some brakes for a troublesome grade.

Startling headlines proclaimed that a liner, the *Hesperia*, was sinking—torpedoed probably, though not certain—S. O. S. calls for help until the wireless failed—boats rushing to the rescue—the nearest boat to arrive at the scene about seven P. M. Eastern time, when there would be more news—and a promise of war if the liner had been torpedoed!

The brakeman sat down beside the Boomer. The stock car on top of which they were seated was about midway between engine and caboose in a string of some thirty cars, all loaded with horses, highballing into the East.

"Ain't it though!" The brakeman mopped his face with a limp, red handkerchief. "Them Dutchmen are just ripping things wide open!"

The day had been hot, suffocating, as, in fact, the last three days had been; and even now, in the evening, seated in the draft caused by the speed of the train, the air was not refreshing, was enervating in its burning warmth. But relief was promised in the rapid gathering of massy clouds, and the heavy, uneasy oppressiveness which had held threatened to materialize soon into a storm.

"New York will be just humming!" The Boomer's eyes danced. "I'll see some of the fun. Used to pound brass there, too."

"Yes? That so?"

"Yes, had got to be a district wire chief. But another fellow did me dirt and I lost out."

The Boomer looked away to where the first flickers of lightning were beginning to jag up above the horizon. The Boomer was young; and a careless observer might have reckoned his a face without much strength. But an understanding one would have summed it differently—the face of eager, changeful youth; and wise eyes, eyes which read life easily, banteringly.

Visualized before him the Boomer could

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see the big New York office with its row upon row of clicking telegraph instruments, the huge switchboards— But most clearly there could he see Corhan, and Mary, laughing, black-haired, black-eyed Mary. Somehow the thought of Mary always gave the Boomer more satisfaction, even, than the thought of his mission.

"Yes?" remarked the shack again, as one politely interested.

The Boomer faced the brakeman, his eyes suddenly burning.

"But I got the evidence here!" he cried triumphantly, and turned back the flap of his coat to reveal the end of a letter sticking above an inner pocket. "And I'm going back to show him up!"

"You don't say!" The shack heard many boomers' stories; and always tried to convey the impression that he accepted them at par.

"Yes," went on the Boomer confidentially. "Somebody was selling tips from the stock wires—getting a rich graft out of it. And it finally came down to between him and me. He shoved it on to me and I couldn't disprove it. But I knew he was guilty as Hades! Now I got the proof—" again he tapped his pocket, triumphantly— "and I'll show him up!"

"Well! I hope you do!" The brakeman exclaimed enthusiastically. "The dirty duffer!"

"I've got him, and I'll squeeze him—" the Boomer clenched the newspaper with upraised fist—"just like that!"

The engine's whistle bellowed for the block ahead; and in a minute they went flying by a little telegraph tower.

"That's Willows," said the shack. "We'll soon make Crows Nest." Which, seemed to recall something to his mind, for he offered some advice.

"Say," he said, "we stop at Crows Nest for water—it's our last stop before we get into the yards. You better get off there and catch a drag the rest of the way."

The Boomer's face betokened his disappointment; but he accepted the suggestion without demur.

"All right," he assented, unquestioningly taking the advice for what it was meant to be—just a little friendly tip. He knew there was a reason for it.

"These horses go to France, you know," explained the brakeman. "And some Dutchman, or somebody, tried to poison a whole train of them just like this, about a week ago. So from the time we get into the yards the bulls watch it like hawks."

"I see; thanks," said the Boomer.

The darkness gathered fast with the flying, black clouds through which the lightning played vividly; and as they talked the rumble of the thunder rolled high above the roar of the train. The Boomer, presently, glanced overhead.

"Those clouds—see them mobilize. Talk about preparedness! I'll be better under cover, anyway, I guess!"

The brakeman also looked at the sky apprehensively.

"They mean business. Going to be a bad one," he said. "But most anything would be better than this heat."

The whistle ahead bellowed again and the train slowed down as the brakes went on. The shack arose to leave.

"That's for Crows Nest," he said. "Good luck!"

The Boomer, too, arose and moved toward the ladder at the end of the car.

"Thanks. Same to you," he answered. "So long!"

A sudden gust of wind swept his last words away. He quickly climbed down, and when the train came to a stop stepped to the ground.

II

OVER the highways, north from Pittsburgh and the Ohio Valley, south from New York State, the commercial wires stretch, to join at Crows Nest with those that follow the railroad from the West, Cleveland and Chicago way. Thence eastward, following the trunk line to make the passage through the Alleghenies to New York City and the Atlantic seaboard.

A hamlet, Crows Nest; a score of houses huddled on the northern side of a fertile valley. On the southern side, a good half-mile distant, the little station, and a water-tank, and a narrow river between.

As the Boomer turned his practised eye from the intersecting wires to watch the disappearing tail lights of the stock train, he felt the first splashes of rain from the coming storm. He stepped into the shelter of the supports which held the water-tank overhead; but the downpour, increasing and flung about by the wind, soon found him.

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"I better get in somewhere," he decided. "This storm will be no joke."

He peered around for a better protection, aided by the intermittent flashes of lightning which split the almost total darkness. There was not a car on the short station siding; and the station itself was dark.

"Closed for the night," surmised the Boomer. But nothing better offering he turned up his coat collar and made a break across the tracks to the little building.

The doors were locked, as he had expected. Then, with the knowledge of long experience, he tried the front windows. They, also, were fastened.

The rain kept coming heavier and heavier, and the wind grew in ferocity so that the eaves were practically no protection. So he moved around to the rear of the station.

"Sometimes they do forget one," he said, and tried the office window there. The sash raised.

"Glory be!" he chuckled, and clambered inside, happily. "What luck!"

He closed the window and removed his wringing coat to shake what water he could from it. The night roared with the rage of the storm, the rain beating upon the roof with a violence that threatened to pound it into pieces. The little building shivered and creaked in the howling wind.

"Man! Did you ever hear such wind and rain? I've seen——"

A blinding flash of lightning tore the blackness and behind the Boomer something in the office cracked like a pistol. He swung around, startled for an instant. Then he laughed.

"That'll be a fuse!"

He waited for another flare of the lightning and, when it came, a long switchboard, its brass glittering, fastened to the wall about five feet above the floor, stood out sharply for a second. Along the bottom of the board was a row of brass plugs and below the plugs a long line of numbers.

"A test office!" exclaimed the Boomer, recollecting the intersecting wires which he had noted outside.

He fumbled around in the gloom until he found a chair, over which he hung his wet coat. The raging wind struck the station broadside and the building groaned under the strain as it hung quivering upon its foundations. The Boomer was afraid for a moment that it was going to capsize; but it settled back and he went to the front of the little office to look out of the window.

The window faced to the north, toward the stream and the little cluster of houses across the valley. The lightning played unceasingly in great, forked streaks; the crash of the thunder was continuous and the rain teemed down in seemingly solid sheets. The Boomer caught glimpses of trees thrashing helplessly, bending and twisting in the gale.

"There goes one!" he ejaculated as he beheld, down by the river, an uprooted tree sway and fall into the water.

"There goes another!" he cried again as he saw a tree close to the water-tank falter.

And then, by some freak of the wind, it was caught up and hurled squarely upon the water-tank. No supports could withstand that mighty blow. The Boomer saw the tank topple. There was a crack, and a stab of light revealed the flying staves and a flood of water covering the tracks. He stared aghast.

"I'm better here than there!" he said thoughtfully. "Better here than on top of that stock car, too!" he added.

For a long time, spellbound, he watched the progress of the storm—how long he could not have told, probably an hour or more—the rain, trees falling, the crashes when the lightning struck. At times the noise was nearly deafening; while during it all the little station rocked and trembled dangerously.

"There'll be no more trains tonight," the Boomer concluded. "Too many washouts and slides."

At intervals the fuses in the switchboard blew out; and it was an exceptionally loud explosion that finally drew him from the window.

"Must have been several in that one!" he exclaimed. "Surely that's about all of them!"

A thought struck him—

"That switchboard will be needed tonight!"

The Boomer debated with himself for a few minutes. Then finally, having reached a decision, he searched through an inner pocket for a dry match. Having found one, he prudently drew all the window-shades before striking it; which done, he located a gas-jet near the switchboard, turned on the gas and lit it.

The light illumined the small office—

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a long desk at the front with a few books and papers scattered over it and several telegraph instruments fastened close to the wall—a copying press, a stationery case, a ticket case and ticket stamp, two chairs, a little stove; it was all familiar to the Boomer. He had seen dozens of them; all on the same general order. All but the large switchboard; that was an exception for such a small station. The Boomer, however, knew switchboards.

There was a little flat-topped desk close up against the wall, right beneath the switchboard, and on it was a test instrument—a telegraph key and sounder on a wooden base with a three-foot wire cord attached. To the free end of the cord was fastened a brass plug for plugging in on any wire of the switchboard.

The Boomer smiled in happy surprise as he noted some of the numbers extending along the bottom of the switchboard—familiar numbers. He took up the loose cord of the test instrument.

"365—366—367," he read. "It's just like coming home!"

So he plugged in on them, for in the old days Mary and Corhan and he had once worked those three wires together. Friendly rivalry it had been then between Corhan and him for the smiles of laughing Mary; friendly until Corhan's perfidy had come between them—then the Boomer had gone. Yet now, as always, the thought of Mary made the Boomer's eyes grow warm. In a vague, rather indefinite way he felt that she had something to do with his coming back.

But the three wires stood open. Then one after the other he cut in on all the wires. Not one was any good. He counted them.

"Thirty-six wires, and every fuse gone! Some storm!"

He found a little drawer in the desk and opening it discovered a small tin box of soft fuse-wire and a screw-driver. Next he removed the fuse-blocks from the top of the switchboard and with expert fingers renewed all the fuses, the board sputtering and cracking as the lightning played upon the wires outside. That finished, he again cut in with the test instrument. And in all that array of wires but one was working through.

"258," exulted the Boomer. "Another old friend!"

He adjusted the instrument, and immediately heard something that held him, motionless.

"CH—CH—NY—93—" clicked the sounder; and the Boomer knew New York was calling Chicago for wire trouble. In a moment Chicago answered.

"I—CH."

"Good! This is the general wire chief New York. This is the last wire we have out of NY that is working!" The Boomer, listening tensely, gasped. "Everything north and south has gone and everything west but this one. This storm has cut us off, isolated us—worst storm in years. Watch this wire, keep on it—that *Hesperia* stuff is just coming in and the press is wild for service. Stick——"

Another flash, and 258 was dead again!

"Corhan!" breathed the Boomer. "Corhan! I'd know your swing in a thousand!" To the master operator each man's sending is as distinctive as his voice. "Corhan, you're getting up—general wire chief now!" The Boomer exhaled a long breath. "But the harder the fall, Corhan, the harder the fall!"

THEN the Boomer jumped to action, the expert telegrapher rising above all. In a trice he had a new fuse in the still warm fuse-block; but the wire still stood open. He jammed a plug into the ground wire strip and was rewarded by a faint click from his test instrument.

"That crack put her down west of here," he said.

Carefully, knowingly, he turned the screws to bring the armature of his sounder to the proper tension, and when attuned to his satisfaction swiftly began to call, disguising the touch of his sending by slightly altering his spacing so that Corhan would not recognize him.

"NY—NY—NY——"

The third call brought an answer.

"I—NY!" snapped the sounder. "Thank God! Was afraid I had lost you!"

"You did!" said the Boomer. "This is not CH!"

"Not CH!" The Boomer read the amazement Corhan expressed just as well as if he had heard him speak. "Not CH? Who then?"

The Boomer reflected a swift second.

"Might as well tell him," he decided.

He answered, "Crows Nest."

"Crows Nest!" The instrument spelled

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the astonishment of the man at New York. "Crows Nest! At this time of the night! Crows Nest closes at six o'clock."

The Boomer, thinking rapidly, was ready.

"Yes—usually closes then. But I'm a new man here and when this storm came up tonight thought you might need some testing, so I just dropped in to see. When the wires started to fail I kept picking them over and happened to be on 258 when I heard you tell CH it was the last one you had. Then when it went up I put a new fuse on and grounded it. It's no good west of here—stands open."

"Good boy! Fine!" praised Corhan. "You got the idea. You know what you're doing! Quick now. See if you can get a wire to Chicago or any place west of you!"

"Just a minute. Stay close," said the Boomer.

For a little time he worked busily over the switchboard, changing fuses, cutting in, grounding, and began to fear, when he met with success. His instrument closed with a tiny snap, and he called:

"CH—CH—93——"

Almost at once he got an answer.

"I—CH."

"Is this the wire chief?" flashed the Boomer.

"No."

"Put the wire chief of this district on, quick!" ordered the Boomer.

"OK—second."

In a little time the Boomer's sounder spoke:

"This is the wire chief at CH. Is that NY?"

"No. This is Crows Nest. All of New York's wires to you are gone. I've got just one wire to him—258—but it is open between here and CH. Stick here, tight, until I tell NY. What wire you on?"

"385," answered CH.

"Good Lord!" said the Boomer. "I'm on 187. They're crossed. How are your other wires?"

"In pretty fair shape; that is, all except this bunch that goes through Crows Nest and our wires to the east. But in all other directions we can get through. This storm didn't seem to strike us except out your way."

"OK," said the Boomer. "Watch for me until I come back."

The Boomer called New York.

"I have CH—but only one wire, too—187. He answers on 385, so they are crossed. Want to try a patch? It's pretty weak. Am afraid it won't stand, though."

"We'll try it. Set 258 east to 187 west. If it don't work straighten the patch and come back in on 258. Get in on the patch yourself so you can tell if it works."

"OK," said the Boomer, and made the patch as requested, arranging the plugs in the switchboard to make one good wire of the two, or, rather, of the three, 258, 187 and 385.

But the patch stood open and despite adjustings the Boomer's instrument did not close. So he pulled out the plugs and cut back onto 258.

"It's no good," he told NY. "Too much escape and that cross queer it I guess. What a mess things must be in!"

"Mess is right—it's awful! Everybody down here is wild. They are threatening to murder me if I don't get this stuff through. Just think, the biggest night in years and we are cut off from everybody but you—north, south and west, not a wire, telegraph or telephone, but this!"

The Boomer was considering hard. He knew about what it would be like down there in New York, the excitement, the suspense, and all that. He had worked there himself on some big nights. But never on a night like this, a night when the whole nation lay quivering under the threat of war, nerves strained for the first flash of news from the *Hesperia*—for the knowledge of whether war was, or was not, to be. And that news, that knowledge, was bottled up in New York. Bottled up, that is, unless he, the Boomer, chose to uncork it.

The key open before him, hands slowly clenching and unclenching, brain whirling, the Boomer thought and planned. The heralding of the nation's immediate destiny, for peace or for war—anyway, the breaking of the tension—all that lay within the Boomer's power. The sense of that power thrilled him, that and the fiery fever of his youth to put this thing across. It was big, the biggest opportunity of his life, so big that he scarcely could grasp it.

But there was Corhan. If the Boomer put this over, would not Corhan gain great praise for it? Eyes fixed on his slowly clenching fingers, he remembered his boast to the brakeman, smiled, and decided. Yes, that's the way he held Corhan—held him clutched with slowly closing, strong fingers.

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His hand trembling slightly the Boomer reached for the key.

"The only way, I guess," he told Corhan, "to get that stuff out is for you to give it to me. I'll relay it to Chicago and Chicago can distribute it from there. He tells me his wires are in pretty good shape. The storm did not hit him as hard as you."

"Can you do that?" came from Corhan. "But sure you can! Say, that will be great! Fine!" The sounder fairly buzzed in Corhan's eagerness. "Do you think this wire will hold? How's your weather there?"

The Boomer listened. He had almost forgotten; but it seemed to him that the storm was showing some sign of abatement.

"It's still holding on," he answered, "although not so fiercely. Guess the worst is over."

"All right. It's all we can do," said Corhan. "You'll not be sorry, let me tell you, if you can relay this stuff to Chicago. This bunch down here is nearly nuts. They promise anything if we can get their news out. If you'll take it I'll stay here and send it myself."

"I'll try it. Wait until I get something to copy upon."

The Boomer rummaged through the stationery case until he found something that suited him—a pad of forms, blank on the back. On the desk he found a pencil, then pulled a chair up to the little desk beneath the switchboard and sat down.

"Now," he told Corhan, "Let it come!"

And Corhan did. News came to soothe the nation, news to drive away the specter of war. The *Hesperia* had not been torpedoed. A floating mine had done the deed. She still floated when the first rescue boat had reached her. All on board had been transferred safely. A brief statement from the captain of the *Hesperia*—the position of the vessel at the time of the explosion—the speed—the state of the weather—a short list of some of the prominent personages on board—and so on and so on, the sounder beating rhythmically to Corhan's touch, the Boomer's pencil flying. Then, at the end of a half-hour, the Boomer opened the key, remarking to himself—

"Corhan, you still have the old swing!"

He thought nothing of his own beautiful copy.

"That will be enough for a little while," he told Corhan on the wire. "I'll relay this to CH on 385 now and tell him to see that it is distributed to wherever they can reach. I'll let you know when I'm ready for more."

"OK," said Corhan.

In about thirty-five minutes the Boomer called NY again.

"All clear—it's gone!" he said. "Go ahead."

The Boomer's instrument jumped with Corhan's eager praise.

"It's the greatest ever!" Corhan buzzed. "This means something to us. The only company to get anything out of New York tonight! Stay with it! Here's some more."

For another period the Boomer copied. Brief sketches of heroism on a stormy sea—of the *Hesperia* sinking soon after all were rescued—the names of the rescue boats and their captains—another list of passengers—some short statements from several of Wall Street's great financiers to keep the stock markets in hand—until the Boomer again interrupted at the end of thirty minutes.

Thus, working at top speed in half-hour relays, the hours sped for the Boomer. And at last Corhan said—

"That's all—all the *Hesperia* stuff we have."

"And that's enough!" answered the Boomer. "I'm tired."

"Call me when you're through," said Corhan.

"OK," said the Boomer.

Corhan again was all praise when the Boomer called, shortly.

"You have done magnificently! No one could have done better. It's the greatest night I ever put in!"

"Thanks!" said the Boomer. "Here too!"

"You must come down," urged Corhan. "Come to New York. We'll sure find a place for you here. Nothing will be too good for you!"

"Is that so?" The Boomer smiled grimly to himself as he said it. "All right then, I'll certainly come."

"Do!" said Corhan. "And say," he added, "what's your name?"

The Boomer pried the key open swiftly when Corhan asked that, and he left it open. For it was no part of his plan that Corhan should know him, now.

"That'll be about all, just now, Corhan," the Boomer made inward comment.

From the switchboard he pulled out one

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of the plugs which cut 258 into his instrument and let it fall carelessly to the floor. This of course threw the wire open, and Corhan, after waiting a little for an answer, would probably think that the wire had failed. The plug upon the floor would explain to the operator coming on duty in the morning the reason for 258 being open; he would decide the plug had become loose and fallen out during the night.

Quickly the Boomer replaced the other plugs as he had found them in the switchboard and rearranged the other things in the office as they had been.

He then went to the window in front. Shoving aside the shade, he was surprised to note that the rain had ceased, that all trace of the storm was gone from the sky, and that the first streaks of dawn were already showing in the east. So quickly, then, had the night passed. He was glad of it.

"That's good," he said. "I'll be leaving now."

He let the shade fall back into place and turned for a final glance around the scene of his night's labor, the semblance of a smile upon his face.

"Not bad!" he decided. "Not bad!"

He chuckled gently, well pleased with himself. And, after putting on his coat, he turned out the light, raised the shades, and, walking to the rear window, pushed up the sash.

"By-by!" he said gaily, and climbed out.

THE general wire chief hovered over Mary Mathews's desk.

"You've seen the papers, of course?" he said.

His voice was low—only loud enough to reach her ear above the clatter of the roomful of typewriters and telegraph instruments.

She looked up into his eager eyes and nodded.

"Yes," she answered. "Congratulations! It was very nice. They gave you quite a spread."

"Didn't they though!" He laughed softly, richly. "It was a great night's work!" He bent closer, lowering his voice still more: "And it will mean something better, too, I hope. A raise, or a higher position."

Her face colored slightly and she lowered her eyes.

"That—that will be fine," she faltered.

His handsome face was quite close to her averted ear.

"Yes," he said impetuously, "it will be fine! And you know why, Mary! You remember your promise to give me my answer when I got my next advance. And it must be 'yes,' Mary! It's got to be! I'm on my way to the general manager's office now. He wants to see me."

His words poured into her ear, burning. A half frightened look came into her eyes.

"Oh!" she said.

Her flush deepened. Speech was driven from her for a moment. Nevertheless, she quickly gathered herself together and strove to divert him.

"But, wasn't it strange about the operator at Crows Nest last night! Who could it have been?"

"I don't know. Just as I asked him his name the wire failed." Corhan's voice was somewhat impatient. "When we finally got through to Crows Nest this afternoon the regular operator there knew nothing of him. He just disappeared."

He reverted to his other topic:

"You can't put me off any longer. I'll come tonight for——"

A sudden wild thought among the confusion of others swept through her mind, and, still striving to head him off, she interrupted him, almost expressing it before she could stop.

"What if that operator at Crows Nest——"

However she did stop, barely in time, annoyed at herself for the near-blunder; for things were not well between the general wire chief and him she had nearly named; it was forbidden ground. Yet even in the midst of her annoyance she could not help but wonder why she could not forget the three-years-absent one who had gone under a cloud; and if her answer to the general wire chief would not have been 'yes,' long before, if the memory of the other had not persisted. But Corhan, intent, seemed not to notice her confusion.

"I must go," he said. "Mr. Evans will be waiting."

"Let him wait!" said a long-absent voice, interrupting.

They whirled about, surprised and startled. The Boomer, his approach unheard, stood close behind them, looking

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from one to the other with steady, half-humorous eyes.

"Tom McCray!" exclaimed Mary.

A light leaped to her eyes, such as Corhan, looking from the Boomer to Mary at her joyous exclamation, had never before seen. Jealousy and rage filled him.

"McCray, you're bold to come back here!" he said bruskly, frowning. "Have you forgotten the warning that was given you?"

McCray's steady eyes rested upon the general wire chief.

"No, Corhan," he said soberly. "I've not forgotten."

Sudden fear had come into Mary's face at Corhan's words.

"Tom," she broke in, "go away, quick, before they find you!"

He smiled at her.

"Don't worry!" he said. "I've come to clear my slate. I'm expecting to stay here now."

Something whimsical came into his countenance.

"You see," he added, "Corhan, here, himself invited me to come!"

"What!" cried Corhan, staring.

"Last night, you know," reminded McCray.

Understanding dawned upon Corhan. A little cry came from Mary; her wild thought of a minute ago had been right, after all.

"Tom," she said, "you were the operator at Crows Nest last night!"

"Yes," he said, nodding.

"McCray," said Corhan, the hint of a sneer in his voice, "you can't deceive me. It was not your touch upon the wire last night. I know it of old. I'm afraid you lie!"

McCray turned full upon Corhan and a single flash of wrath flamed from his eyes. Yet he quickly controlled himself, and, taking a sheaf of papers from a pocket, he tossed it on to the desk before the general wire chief—a bundle of loose sheets torn from a pad of railroad forms, the blank side covered with elegantly written copy.

"There's the proof," said McCray calmly. "And further, Corhan, if I lie how would I know that the operator at Crows Nest last night worked with you on 258? How would I know that he got hold of Chicago on 385, himself being on 187? For of course the numbers of the wires were not published in the newspaper's report today of the incident. And how would I know he tried to make a patch to get you through to Chicago, and that the patch was no good? And finally, how would I know that he then told you to give him your stuff and he would relay it to Chicago, which he did?"

"Tell me that, Corhan!" he demanded. "As for my sending, I disguised that; for I knew it was you and did not wish that you should know me."

Corhan gazed helplessly at the sheets of copy; and for a moment there was not a work spoken.

"Do I speak the truth, Corhan?" pressed McCray at last.

"Yes—I guess you do," reluctantly admitted Corhan, swallowing hard. "But it will not do you any good!" he added vindictively.

"Maybe not," said McCray, "if that were all!"

"If that were all?" repeated Corhan.

He stared hard into McCray's face, and something he read there seemed to chill him, to fill him with some strange foreboding, for apprehension flew into his countenance.

"Yes, if that were all," said McCray again. "But that is not all." His eyes held the general wire chief for a second. "Old Guthrey is dead, Corhan!" he said abruptly.

McCray bent forward and his voice grew hard as he perceived the agitation that flashed over Corhan's face as the wire chief heard old Guthrey's name.

"Yes," McCray went on, before Corhan could speak, "old Guthrey that used to work here on the stock wires, and who helped you to pull off your wire tapping stunt—old Guthrey whom you had fired not long after I left, fired because you were afraid to have him around. Listen, and I'll tell you.

"About a month ago I hit the S. P. for a job, down in Arizona. And the first place they sent me was to a little town away out across the desert, at the foot of the mountains. I was to relieve the third trick man there who, they told me, was sick. And when I walked into the little office there the night I arrived, here was old Guthrey on the job!

"He was in bad shape, very bad, old Guthrey was, his health gone, and I did what I could to help him. Probably he was grateful to me, probably he wanted to help right a wrong before he died; and, also,

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very likely he remembered how ungrateful you had been. Anyway, two days before he died—which was just ten days ago today—he gave me this."

McCray once more reached in his coat, and this time from an inner pocket he took a long envelope which he opened, extracting from it a long sheet of paper.

"This is what he gave me, Corhan," cried McCray, holding the paper up, "a thing that made him feel better and that sent me East again. Old Guthrey's confession, written and signed by himself, and duly attested and witnessed. You know what a revelation that would be, what a tale of treachery and deception!"

McCray looked into the general wire chief's fear-stricken, gray face.

"How about the hidden tunnel in the east end of the basement, Corhan, the one which led to the underground cable where the stock wires that came into your switchboard were tapped; the tunnel which was not found when you so cleverly discovered the other one, the one which led from the west end of the basement to the underground cable which held the stock wires that came into my switchboard, and which was merely a blind to throw the suspicion and evidence on to me?

"And how about your two outside partners, the two who were never caught or known—how about Carney and Woodside? Old Guthrey told me where I could find them, Corhan, if it was necessary."

Again McCray paused, as if waiting for the general wire chief to speak; but never a word came from Corhan's lips.

"When I came," resumed McCray then, "I heard you say the general manager would be waiting. Probably he has been detained long enough. Shall we go see him together, you and I and old Guthrey's confession?"

He looked at Corhan with grim humor, the memory of his own unlovely departure, three years since, in his eyes. Corhan's face was drawn, the last shred of his self-assurance gone. He glanced about him desperately, darting furtive eyes toward the doorway that led to the elevators. He felt Mary's accusing gaze fixed upon him. He looked into McCray's face, and there was miserable appeal in his expression.

"Corhan," said McCray suddenly, as he perceived that dumb pleading, "if you want to run for it before the storm breaks, why, go. I'll give you that much chance. I'll wait here until you're out of sight."

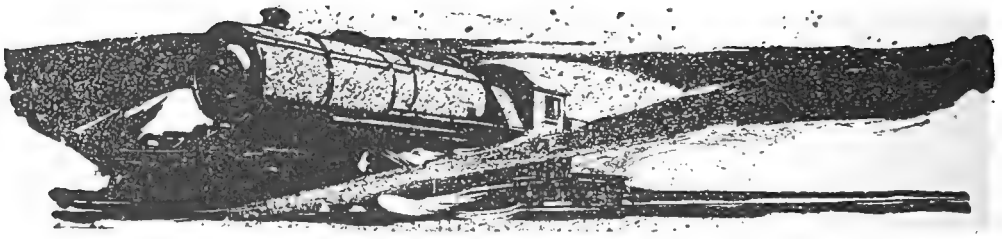
Mary and the Boomer stared after Corhan, watching him thread quickly down the long aisles through the maze of desks and tables. He reached the doorway and, without a backward glance or pause, he passed through and was gone.

They continued to stare for a little bit, even after he had disappeared from their sight. Then finally, as if by a mutual instinct, they both faced about. And what each read in the eyes of the other was delectably satisfactory.

"Mary," said McCray, his face shining with sudden exultation, "will you stay here until I come back?"

"Yes," she said happily.

"Then I must go," he said, grinning. "Mr. Evans will be waiting!"



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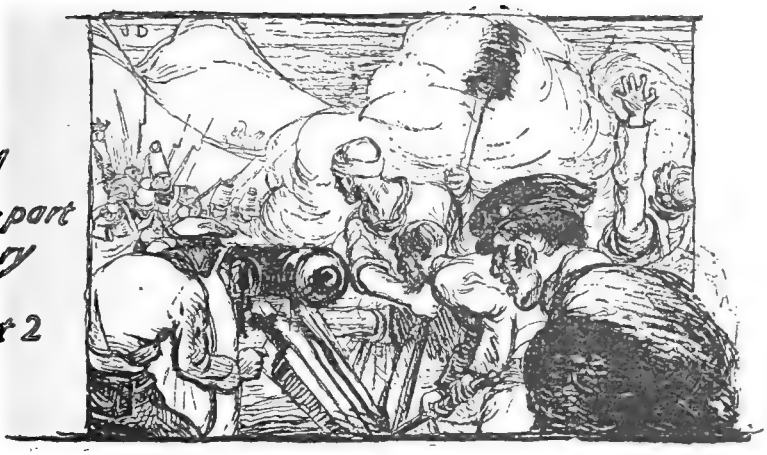
MALENA

A Three-part Story

Part 2



by FARNHAM BISHOP *and* ARTHUR GILCHRIST BRODEUR

Authors of "In the Grip of the Minotaur."

The First Part of the Story Briefly Retold in Story Form.

CAPTAIN HARRY CULVER, of the U. S. Flying Artillery, sat hunched over a table in his quarters in Monterey, drawing up a report for General Zachary Taylor. In detail he explained the character of the territory around Monterey. The year was 1846. The little American army of occupation must meet a vastly superior force of Mexicans advancing under President Santa Anna.

"At La Angostura, one and one-half miles south of Buena Vista, our small force can best check the enemy's advance," Culver wrote.

Suddenly there came to his ears a drunken shout: "Cut her claws—the Mexican cat. Grab her!"

Culver was in the street in an instant. In the pale light he beheld a tall girl, a thin, flashing blade of steel in her hand, holding off a half-dozen drunken soldiers. At her feet lay a gray-haired man, his head bathed in blood.

"Go to your quarters!" ordered Culver sternly, and the men obeyed.

The girl was leaning over the old man. "Malena," Culver heard him mutter.

"He is my uncle," the girl told the American, as others of Culver's command ran up. "We will take him home."

And when she bade Culver good night she pressed into his hand a card which gave him the greatest start of all. For, though he had been willing to swear the girl's face belonged to none other than a Spaniard of the highest type, the card read:

MISS MADELINE FORTESCUE,
Fortescue House,
Hawarden, Flintshire, England.

Three-quarters of an hour later, Mr. Zebulon P. Fales, confidential agent of the State Department at Washington, met one Captain Hidalgo, a trim Mexican officer, in a house on the same street in which Culver had left Malena.

"My offer to you who are official agent of President Santa Anna, is this: My Government will give him fifteen million dollars and will retire from northern Mexico if your Government will recognize our title to California, New Mexico and Texas. Santa Anna can pocket the cash and retire."

"My President is a man of honor!" retorted Hidalgo. "But if you can have Taylor evacuate Saltillo, Buena Vista and Monterey, then Santa Anna can discuss peace—but our people will not treat with an invader."

"I'll do all I can, captain, and expect to succeed. Your plan will fix old Zach Taylor, too, so I like it."

As Fales disappeared the Mexican ground his wineglass under his heel.

"Would it were in your face, pig," he muttered fiercely.

Meanwhile Captain Culver had returned to his desk, his thoughts of Miss Fortescue. He continued his report laboriously; then his eyes closed and he slept, pen still clutched tightly.

Suddenly he was aroused. A girl stood bending over him. An instant, and the candle was snuffed out.

"Malena!" Culver cried, but she was gone.

A sentry rushed in. He swore no girl had passed him in the hall; nor had any one gone through the window. Apparently Culver's visitor had vanished through the very walls of the old Spanish house.

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THE FOLLOWING day Fales had his troubles with General Taylor.

"Attend to your own business!" snapped the general. "I was ordered here by the President to make war on Mexico. If he wants me to march out he can order me to through the War Department. I hold Buena Vista Pass which is the key to this part of the country. No wonder Santa Anna wants me to give it up!"

"Then the slick Mexican I dealt with last night must have known your plan to hold Buena Vista!" cried Fales, turning to Culver. "You worked out these plans, captain. Did you leave them unguarded for a moment last night?"

Quickly Culver told General Taylor all that had happened the night before.

"Aha!" nodded Fales. "A British woman, at night—in an American officer's quarters. And Britain owes us a grudge over Oregon. Arrest Miss Fortescue before she can escape!"

"Cool off!" snapped the general. "The lady is a British subject."

Hot words followed between Fales and Culver, the latter defending Miss Fortescue with a positiveness that brought a knowing smile from General Taylor.

"That will do, gentlemen," the general interrupted. "I shall look into the girl's case myself, and you, Fales, must accept my decision."

To the general's surprise, the girl visited him that very day and explained her mission to the American army. Her brother Gregory had run away from England and, she believed, enlisted with the Americans. Her mother was prostrated. She, Madeline, had come to Mexico to find the boy.

The old general straightway offered her the right to inspect his forces. Fales hurried to Culver with the news:

"Now we'll make her convict herself. She is to inspect your command—visit your barracks. Leave some papers on your desk. I'll hide in your wardrobe. If she's a spy she'll manage to sneak in here during inspection."

Culver agreed, seeing a way of getting rid of Fales once for all. He knew the plan would fail, and it did.

Malena's aunt had accompanied her to the barracks and, becoming overheated, must rest in Culver's room. Culver left, to return after the ladies departed. Fales popped from the wardrobe.

"She looked at your desk, suspicious-like, and then sneaked over here, out of my sight!" he exclaimed.

"No one sneaked anywhere but you!" Culver snapped in disgust, sorting through the untouched papers. "Now get out. She is innocent."

Miss Fortescue did not find her brother in Monterey, so General Taylor gave her an escort of dragoons, an ambulance to ride in, and permission to go on to Aguas Nuevas, the concentration point of the army. A venerable Mother Superior accompanied her.

Culver learned with a twinge of regret that Malena was probably to pass out of his life the next morning forever. Then came the order from General Taylor:

"Proceed with your command through Saltillo to Aguas Nuevas tomorrow. Start as soon as possible after dawn."

THE NEXT morn Malena shuddered as her party wound through the deep cañon toward Saltillo. A pistol-shot sounded ahead. They were attacked by Mexican lancers. Miles behind, Culver's approaching battery heard sounds of distant firing. And, lashing their mounts, the Flying Artillery raced to the rescue.

The dragoons of Malena's guard were making a last stand against an overwhelming wave of lancers, when Culver's guns unlimbered and started to mow lanes through the closely packed Mexicans with shrapnel.

The lancers came on, then broke under the withering fire, and finally fled. And Culver's battery trundled wearily southward with Malena and her party. The next day they rode into Saltillo. And still the girl found no trace of her brother.

"My only hope now lies at Aguas Nuevas," she sighed to Culver.

"And if you fail, I suppose you leave Mexico. Malena, I can remain silent no longer. I love you. Now you are going home. But some day, when your mother has recovered and this war is over, will you return to me?"

Malena's deep, honest eyes met those of her soldier steadily.

"I will," she answered.

And the next day's march was one long delight to the lovers. From glorious mountain roads, their cavalcade descended into the valley where lay General Wool's brigade. Malena went at once to the Convent de los Siete Dolores.

General Wool received Culver's report with curt approval. Culver hurried back through the lines. Suddenly his eye caught a drunken young soldier reading an old copy of "Punch." And a moment later he had learned the lad was Gregory Fortescue.

"First sober up," he ordered the boy. "Then report to me at eight to-night at the wine-shop De la Lagrimosa Virgen, and you will receive the surprise of your life."

That evening the meeting came about as Culver had planned. Up to an empty upper room he led Malena, then jerked Fortescue out into the light before her.

"Malena, your brother," he announced.

"Gregory!" she gasped in amazement.

To Culver's bewilderment the boy's mouth flapped open like a strangling fish, and Malena paled as if with fear. The American stepped into the hallway and left the two alone. And a moment later Fortescue followed him.

"This is queer," the lad began. "Why do you bring Malena to me. She used to play with sister and me years ago in England. But don't you know she is a Miranda?"

"Miranda?" shouted Culver.

"Miranda—General Miranda—her father! A Mexican officer!"

Culver felt the floor opening beneath him. Malena, his promised wife, had lied. Fales was right. She had tricked him, made him a tool. She was gaining detailed information about the entire American army. She was a spy!

He dashed up the hall and burst into the room. It was empty. On the floor lay Malena's skirt. Outside came the cracking challenge of a sentry, the roar of a musket, then the beat of retreating hoofs.

Culver cleared the stairs in four leaps.

"He stole my horse!" cried the sentry.

"—— your horse!" barked Culver and, mounting his own, he spurred into the desert after those dying hoof-beats, his only guide to Malena.

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CHAPTER VII

A MEXICAN PATRIOT

SPURRING his horse in pursuit, Culver followed as fast as he could without drowning out the receding hoof-beats which were all that gave him the direction of the fugitive. The night was pitch-dark, save for the dim light afforded by the stars; and before him stretched a mountainous road for sixteen miles, through country cut up by *barrancas* in which the object of his quest might hide.

Worse still, he knew that if he failed to overtake Malena within a few hours, she would emerge from the hill-road into the desert which stretched away, waterless and almost trackless, nineteen miles further to Encarnacion. Nor could he be sure that the handful of American volunteer cavalry stationed at the ranch-house of Encarnacion would stop her; and he was not sure that he wanted them to.

Malena—his Malena—a Mexican spy! If she should be captured, she must suffer a spy's death; and if she escaped, he would never see her again. Rather a hundred times let her escape, if that were all. But in the pretended search for her brother, she had been able to inspect the entire army and was doubtless on her way to Santa Anna with a full report of the tiny force that opposed the overwhelming Mexican host. If she could win past Encarnacion, the way was clear to San Luis Potosi and Santa Anna.

All at once his mind, running back over the details of her activities with the army, reeled with the thought of a new terror. His report to Taylor! What if she had really been in his room that night? Against his will, Fales's charge obsessed his senses and took complete possession of them. If she had been there, she had certainly read at least part of the report. Once Santa Anna knew what he had written there, the American army must retreat to the Rio Grande or be overwhelmed.

But if Yell's cavalry stopped her at Encarnacion, where she must go or perish of thirst, she would be shot or hanged for the spy she was. He alone could prevent it; if he could overtake her, he could save both Malena and the army.

All the while these thoughts coursed through his mind, his heart was torn with a throbbing pain, with bitter grief over the deception she had practised upon him. Into what mad confidence his love had seduced him!

And ever, as he chewed the bitter reflection, as he thought and planned how he would overtake her and retrieve all the misfortune his love had wrought, he rode and listened, following the distant hoof-beats with straining ears, holding his horse to a pace that would keep them audible still.

On, on, over the hard, re-echoing road.

Malena was a match for him. Only one thing prevented her from urging her horse to its utmost: the thought of the thirsty desert she would have to conquer before she could reach and pass Encarnacion.

THE hours passed. With consummate horsemanship, and with keen eyes trained ahead and on every patch of deeper shadow, Culver kept on. At last a widening stretch of starlit sky told him he was riding between the lower peaks toward the gate of the desert. The dark walls blotting out his view grew lower and lower; by almost imperceptible degrees, the gloom became less intense. Just as he rode between the last outpost slopes, the guiding hoof-beats died out altogether.

Culver gave a little gasp of disappointment. Only a scant fifty yards separated him from the desert's edge; but those fifty yards might be just enough to lose Malena forever. Before, the vast wide desert invited her wherever she chose to ride, its sands muffling all sound of her escape. If the moon would only rise!

He urged his horse to the utmost, determined to overtake her before it should be too late. For an endless half hour he galloped on, without seeing or hearing a sign.

"No use!" he sighed; and then, irradiating the sandy plain with its yellow light, the moon came up from the western slope behind him. For an hour it must have been hidden by the mountain wall; and now it stood well up over his shoulder.

He searched the desert before him, to both sides, riding at full speed.

Thank God, he was not too late! There, perhaps two hundred yards ahead, growing slowly larger to the southeast, a dark spot moved against the lighter darkness of the moonlit night. Though he could scarcely see it, he knew that it was Malena, and that

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he was gaining on her. It grew and grew, seeming to come palpably nearer. Now he knew that he was gaining, but drew rein and permitted his horse a measure of rest.

Well he knew the terrible ride ahead. He realized there was no water for twelve or thirteen miles, and his horse was already weary. Fortunately, Malena's must be wearier still, for he knew his own for one of the best in the army.

His eyes never left that dark blur against the moonlit sand, taking his pace from it, slackening as it drew nearer. He would take things a little more easily, rest his mount, and then overhaul Malena with a swift spurt about three miles this side of Encarnacion. That should be about dawn, before the garrison should sight her.

Gradually he became aware that his quarry was more exhausted than he had supposed. Larger and larger grew the black spot ahead, closer and closer. He drew rein a moment to breathe his panting horse, then on again. Now, as he rode, he could hear once more the thud-thud-thud of the fleeing hoofs, and almost fancied he sensed the labored breathing of the hard-pressed gray.

The stars paled; the moon declined, and through the sky the first faint streaks of dawn suspired. Now, scarce fifty yards lay between him and Malena. Lighter and lighter grew the desert air, and, as he stared through it, he caught the cold glitter of the earliest light on the steel of her stirrup. A few strides more, and the gray's sides shimmered dully ahead, the rider took on form and individuality.

Incredulity seized him. The fleeing form on the great horse before him was no girl, but a man in the uniform of a Mexican lancer. Culver groaned. He had missed her, then, and had somehow blundered away on a false scent. Well, he would overhaul this fellow, at all events, and make him give an account of himself.

Suddenly he remembered. Into his recollection came that which he had seen on the floor of Malena's chamber at Aguas Nuevas: a plain gray traveling skirt, such as she had worn on the day before.

"Of course, you fool!" he murmured under his breath. "She was prepared for discovery at any moment, and had a disguise where she could get at it."

Dawn broke. The time had come. He gave his horse the spurs, and smiled grimly to watch the distance between him and her lessen perceptibly. Malena heard the thudding hoofs behind, looked over her shoulder, and drove her own spurs into the gray's flanks. With the last ounce of strength, the gallant horse responded. Culver's advantage lessened.

On the desperate riders raced, the sturdy roan gaining again, slowly but steadily. The morning light grew white with the hidden sun, and it was now no longer three miles to Encarnacion. Culver bit his lips. Come what might, he must overtake her before they were seen. If the Arkansas troopers once caught sight of that Mexican uniform, their carbines would stop her flight.

Half concealed in its distance by live-oaks between scattered clumps of grayish rock, the ranch-house of Encarnacion rose into view. Culver wet his parched lips.

"Malena!" he called despairingly, love, warning, hopelessness in his tones.

The lithe figure ahead turned in the saddle, a little flutter of white handkerchief waving in one hand; then on again, swifter than before.

Out from the clump of live-oaks to the left dashed a dozen horsemen. In wild hope of forestalling their fire, Culver spurred on, shouting and waving his cap. All at once he pulled in sharply, throwing his mount back on its hind legs. Those were no flat-capped American cavalrymen—they were sombreroed Mexican lancers.

Straight among them Malena rode, while they raised a wild yell of triumph. As Culver turned and fled back into the desert, the lancers followed after, their light, fresh horses rapidly gaining. Laughing and shouting to one another, they rode him down, disdaining to fire their bell-mouthed *escopetas*, knowing full well it would be but a little longer before their steel points would stick him in the saddle.

But Culver was not minded to wait for that. He brought the roan up standing, leaped from the saddle, and took cover behind his horse. The foremost lancer swept down on him with lowered point, and pitched from his seat with a bullet from Culver's pistol in his brain.

With a cry of rage, the second horseman couched his weapon and charged, sure that now the American was helpless. Culver smiled and pulled the trigger again. Down went the Mexican in a huddled heap.

The others pulled up at once and clustered

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together in a knot, jabbering excited Spanish. They were not Mexican regulars but *rancheros*, half soldiers, half bandits, all ignorance and superstition. This was magic! Here was a weapon which shot without reloading, when, as all men knew, the pistols of all Christians must be loaded and primed between shots.

Bringing his long-barreled Colt's revolving pistol—then a new and almost unknown weapon—to bear on the little group, Culver fired once, twice, and again into the thick of them. With one concerted howl of terror, the surviving Mexicans turned and fled back to the ranch-house, leaving five dead behind them. One of the fugitives, bolder than the rest, turned in his saddle and loosed his *escopeta*. With a deep, human groan, the brave roan tossed his head, quivered and died.

Four of the dead men's mounts had stampeded. The fifth stood tugging at the reins still wrapped round its late owner's wrist. Disengaging these, Culver mounted and fled for twenty minutes due north back over the desert. Then, dismounting behind a sand-dune, he opened the dead man's saddle-bags, selected one, and took with it a leather water-bottle. Next he cut off the thorny end of a cactus and inserted the cruel points under the horse's saddle. A blow on the saddle-horn drove the thorns deep into the skin, and the pony sped off in the general direction of Aguas Nuevas as fast as tortured nerves could urge it.

Fortunately for Culver, the sandy surface of the desert was sprinkled with long outcrops of gray, basaltic rock. Keeping to these as best he could, he worked back toward the ranch-house, taking care to expose himself as little as possible. A wide détour brought him round to the western side of the oasis, where he found good cover under the shade of an irregular cluster of boulders, topping a steep, rocky little hill.

From this point he could look down one of the two tiny streets of grass-thatched huts which radiated at right angles from the ranch-house as center, straight into the large, unglassed windows of the house itself. The room which his position commanded was the main living-room of the house, and through his field-glasses he could see every bottle and plate on the long dinner-table, strewn with the untended remains of what had evidently been a splendid supper the night before.

Keeping an observant eye on the house and grounds, Culver opened the Mexican's saddle-bag once more and drew out a handful of tortillas. These, washed down by a draft from the captured water-bottle, restored both his physical well-being and his spirits.

With satisfaction of his bodily needs came retrospection and thought. His shelter there in the rocks was poor enough sanctuary, he knew, if the lancers were not deceived by his ruse; but he hoped the tracks of the thorn-spurred horse would mislead them into thinking he had fled on its back. Far to the north, a diminishing cloud of dust showed where a score of lancers were following its trail.

But it didn't matter, he reflected bitterly. It were better for him to be caught and killed, since the woman he loved had betrayed him, had escaped his pursuit and come safe into the hands of Santa Anna's brigands. It would not be long now before the enemy knew every detail of the plans for Taylor's intended stand at Buena Vista, not long before their hordes would crash down on the unsuspecting Americans and cut them to pieces. And he, Culver, was responsible for it all. Oh, that he had been fool enough to believe Malena! That, having found her out, he had let her escape him! He would have had her, though, if the lancers had not appeared out of nowhere.

He pondered on this for a moment. Good heavens! Santa Anna's army must have left San Luis Potosi some days before, and their advance-guard had taken Yell's troopers garrisoning Encarnacion by surprise. The outpost must have been surrounded and captured by overwhelming numbers, for he had met no fugitives and could see no sign of a fight.

Well, he would stay here at his post until he was discovered, or—and here his overcharged heart felt a ray of hope—until he might, by some lucky chance, get in touch with Malena and prevent her from taking her information to the Mexican leader. So long as he still lived, he would not despair utterly.

The desert sun burned hot about him now, as if seeking, like a pitiless foeman, to enter the protecting shade of his shelter and overpower him. In the shadow of the rocks, he was shielded from the direct rays, but it heated the stone like an oven, so that

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it was all he could do to refrain from drinking up all his precious supply of water. There was no knowing how long he might be beleaguered there, and he must husband his little store.

Throughout the burning day he remained there, dozing off at times, but waking instantly at the sound of the least stir in the hamlet below. Few of the troop of *rancheros* holding it were to be seen, and they were obviously recovering from last night's debauch. There was no sign of Malena, nor did any leave or approach the place, till noon, when the twenty pursuers, weary and empty-handed, rode in from the thirsty north.

At length the sun shone no longer straight down upon him, but leveled its rays from the west into the rocky bulwark which protected him. Slowly it sank lower and lower, the hot, dancing air became still and mellow, and the boulders cast their shadows long and straight behind him. Another hour, and it dropped behind the horizon; twilight fell, then dusk, and at last night closed about him.

Before his observing eyes, fires sprang out around the hacienda, and little tongues of light told him that the candles were being lighted in the great living-room of the ranch-house. Suddenly he heard voices: one a heavy, reverberating bass, and one that he instantly recognized for Malena's. Culver flung himself flat in the darkness and crawled, foot by foot, as stealthily as any Comanche, toward the lighted window, till, a scant five yards from it, he could distinguish every word spoken in the room.

JUST saved from capture at her lover's hands by the timely appearance of the lancers, Malena rode into the outer courtyard of the ranch-house, without waiting to learn the outcome of the fight. She had no wish to stay and see the *rancheros* come back trailing their lance-points in the sand, to cleanse them of her beloved's blood. To all appearance cool enough, she dismounted, beckoned to the nearest soldier to take her horse, and wearily stretched her cramped limbs.

"*Agua, muchacho,*" she commanded; and the fellow strolled languidly over to a water-butt, from which he fetched her a cool draft in a gourd.

"I see that the dogs of Americanos have been driven out of their kennels," she observed. "Who is in command here? Tell him Captain Hidalgo desires to congratulate him on his gallant success."

"Colonel Romero Pilar is our heroic commander," the Mexican replied. "Yesterday morning we took this place from the Yankee cavalry, and sent them prisoners to General Miñon. Unfortunately, *Señor Capitán,* Colonel Pilar is now resting himself, having drunk like the great soldier he is at the feast which was held last night in celebration of our victory."

"Then I will wait until he is pleased to arise and see me," Malena answered, yawning. "In the meantime, find me also a place to rest; for I am weary, having ridden all night."

"*El Señor Coronel* will doubtless desire to entertain the *Señor Capitán* himself," the soldier assured her. "The hacienda is entirely at the captain's disposal. There are comfortable rooms within the house."

Malena walked inside the open door of the ranch-house, passed through the inner court, and entered one of the rooms opening off the *patio.* Finding no one there, she stretched herself out on a cot left by one of the captured or killed Arkansans, and composed herself to sleep.

But in spite of her exhaustion, sleep did not come so easily as she had expected. The indifference which she had assumed fell from her now that she was by herself. Try as she would, she could not drive the thought of Culver from her mind.

As she lay there with closed and aching eyes, she found herself tortured with shame and fear. American though he was, Culver was her lover, and she had spoken truly when she had said that she loved him. And now, having betrayed him basely, she had left him to fight for his life against overwhelming odds, facing an enemy less merciful than death itself.

A woman with tenderer nerves would have been unable to endure the thought of her beloved slain for her offense, virtually by her hands; but a woman of tenderer nerves would not have been in Malena's position. She had schooled herself to danger, to pain, to heartache. All would have been well for her, she reflected bitterly, if she had not been fool enough to fall in love with an enemy of her people.

But she was in love with him, and her love rose up against her, to torture her, to accuse her of deceit, of betrayal, of murder.

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She clenched her hands and bit her lips. She cursed herself and called herself bitter and evil names. There was no self-pity in her mood, no thought of the joy that had gone out of her own life. She felt only for Harry, whom she had cheated and slain, who had gone to death with her in his heart.

But dear God, she told herself, it was for Mexico! For Mexico she would suffer herself to be tortured, to be torn limb from limb, yes, for Mexico she would sacrifice even this splendid lover of hers. And when Mexico had driven the invader from its soil, had freed itself forever from the contamination of Yankee feet, her work would be done and she could find a refuge from her grief, if need be, in death.

At last her weary mind refused its office, and she fell asleep. When she awoke, the day was far gone. Rising, she drew from a pocket a small mirror, arranged the stray wisps of hair that threatened to betray her woman's nature, smoothed the wrinkles from her trousers and coat, and stroked her little false mustache. Her toilet performed, she threw open the door and entered the courtyard. A soldier lying by the fire in the middle of the *patio* sprang to his feet, and, recognizing her uniform, saluted.

"Inform Colonel Pilar that Captain Hidalgo desires to see him," she ordered; and with a "*Si, Señor Capitán,*" the fellow departed.

In a few minutes he returned and informed Captain Hidalgo that Colonel Pilar would be honored to receive him. Malena followed and was ushered into the great living-room. This was principally furnished with a huge, long table, covered with platters, dishes and wine-glasses, and heaped with the makings of a luxurious meal. At one end, his wolf-like face illumined by two large candles, sat a heavily built, coarse-featured officer with long, waxed mustachio.

"Have I the honor of addressing the brave Colonel Pilar?" Malena queried, saluting.

"Most assuredly, *Señor Capitán,*" the big man assured her, rising to his feet with a courtly bow. "I beg that the Captain Hidalgo will be seated and will accord me the pleasure of his company at my frugal supper."

Malena thanked him cordially and sat down at his right, as he indicated. A *mozo* in tattered cotton shirt and breeches entered, bearing wine and cigarets. Accepting a glass and a cigaret, Malena made herself quite comfortable and braced herself for the interview.

"Mexico has to thank you, *Señor Coronel,*" she began, "for a feat of arms both gallant and successful. She owes to you a victory not only gratifying in itself, but of great importance for the further conduct of the campaign."

Ignorant as he was of the supposed Captain Hidalgo's familiarity with Taylor's plans, Pilar took the observation as only a compliment to himself, and visibly swelled with flattered vanity.

"You do me too much honor, *Señor Capitán.* Nevertheless, it is a pleasure to meet a gentleman so discerning. I assure you that there are many officers in our brave army no less distinguished than myself. You, for example. Though I have never had the satisfaction of meeting you before, I can not withhold my admiration of your recent achievement. It was no slight thing to ride the desert without arms, without water, pursued by a devil of an Americano armed to the teeth with pistols that shoot many times. How did you escape him?"

Pilar had angled well for the compliment, but was no less pleased to receive it.

"I should not have escaped, had it not been for the timely interposition of your brave men," Malena answered. "If you, my colonel, had slept as those foolish American cavalrymen slept, I should have been a prisoner at this moment. I sought this interview for the purpose of telling you how great a service—beyond anything you dream of—you have done your country."

Pilar's eyes lighted with interest.

"You shall tell me, then," he replied. "But first let us eat, for the good food is getting cold."

The two attacked the supper with relish enough, for Pilar was always hungry, and Malena had had nothing to eat for twenty-four hours. For a time neither spoke, until, the keen edge of his appetite blunted, Pilar wiped his lips, cleared his throat and pushed back his chair.

"Now we can talk," he announced briskly. "What is this great service to Mexico of which you speak? *Mozo! Vino acá!*"

Malena waved the wine aside, but the gallant colonel rinsed his throat lustily.

"It is this," his guest confided. "Acting as the confidential agent of President Santa Anna, I have been engaged, for some months, in pulling the wool over the eyes

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of the American Government and its agent. I have learned that there is friction between the Government at Washington and the Army of Occupation; possibly a personal rivalry between Polk and General Taylor. If the American army can be decisively defeated, who knows but that internal troubles may arise in the United States so violent that all foreign forces may be withdrawn from our soil? The Yankee agent, a natural fool, concealed nothing from me. Washington, he said, wants peace. The war is unpopular. A retreat would overthrow the prestige of Taylor and at the same time cause the people to lose confidence in their Government.

"But unfortunately the Yankees have proved hard to defeat. Granted, our heroic President has gathered together a force amply sufficient to crush Taylor's little army. But nothing should be left undone which might make the American overthrow more complete. You agree with me, *señor?*"

"Perfectly," Pilar responded. "But what has this to do with me?"

"You shall see. Desiring to obtain all the information possible concerning the numbers and equipment of the Americans, I succeeded, in disguise, in examining the entire forces of the invading army. The Yankees were completely befooled. Their very officers—Generals Scott and Taylor themselves—put all their resources at my disposal. I ascertained that the entire force opposing us between here and Monterey is less than five thousand, four-fifths of whom are raw volunteers."

"*Por las ancas de Barabbas!*" exclaimed the astonished colonel. "Santa Anna will be here tomorrow, with twenty thousand! Is it possible that with this handful they would await our attack?"

"It is more than possible; it is certain. *Señor Coronel*, these Americans are men of pith, *con el pelo en el pecho*. To continue. They must be made to suffer a speedy and heavy defeat; to that end I have spied and lied to obtain a sight of certain papers which contain their secret plan of defense. I have obtained that plan. It is here."

She touched her forehead.

"Once defeated, if our hopes of their withdrawal should fail, they must be driven out town by town, inch by inch. For this much money is necessary, and the coffers of Mexico are empty. But they will not be empty long. Knowing where certain ancient and precious jewels, the inheritance of my family, were concealed, I found access to their hiding-place and withdrew them. Think of it, *Señor Coronel;* the house of my ancestors, the very room which had been my father's, was tenanted by an American officer. Yet I have the jewels now, and soon they will be in the hands of our noble President. They are worth—oh, God knows how much! Now you may know what you have done for Mexico by saving me from the American who pursued me. These jewels are on my person, and but for your brave men would have been taken with me. Behold them, the sinews of Mexico's victorious war!"

Undoing the top button of her coat, Malena unclasped a little chain from which dangled a leathern pouch. In her eagerness, she fairly tore the pouch open and poured a stream of glistening green, red, white, and purple stones into her hand. Necklaces, pendants, brooches, pins, and unset stones, they flashed from her fingers and in a glowing stream from the bulging mouth of the little sack.

The tempting sight was too much for Pilar's predatory instincts. Bandit in time of peace, he was a bandit still at heart. With eyes that shone with greed, he leaped for Malena's outstretched hand. But quick as he was the girl saw the covetous flare in his eyes and started back, frantically trying to cram the gems into their receptacle again.

Once more Pilar rushed forward with clutching hands. Unarmed, her only instinct to protect the treasure she had won for Santa Anna and Mexico, Malena was helpless against his onset. She thrust the pouch into her bosom, a rich emerald chain still dangling from its mouth, and forced the stones still remaining in her hand into one pocket, just as the bandit's body thudded against hers. He threw both arms about her, pinioning hers to her sides; then, holding her in the savage grip of his right arm, he felt for her pockets with his left hand.

Suddenly he relaxed his grip and held her off at arm's length, staring at her with eyes that gleamed with fiendish exultation.

"*Por Dios!*" he gasped. "It is a woman!"

With a cry of terror, Malena wrenched herself partly free, fumbled a second within her coat, and launched herself at Pilar, a keen, thin knife in her hand. The ruffian

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caught the blow as it fell, tore the weapon from her with a brutal twist of her slender wrist, and flung it tinkling against the wall. Holding her bruised hands in one of his, he leered bestially at her, singing in mocking tones:

La Virgen del Pilar dice
Que no quiere ser Francesa:
Que quiere ser Capitána
De la tropa Arragonesa.

"Captain Hidalgo, eh?" he jeered. "Well, little captain of my heart, we shall have a splendid battle, you and I, before you go to Santa Anna to tell him of the jewels you might have brought him. Doubtless he will reward your generosity—ah, little devil!"

As he mocked her, Malena had stooped with lightning swiftness and sunk her teeth deep into his arm below the cuff. The pain forced Pilar to relax his hold. She pulled free and darted behind the great table. Shaking the blood from his wrist, cursing her with vile epithets, he pursued. A few moments of dodging and she faced him across the table.

His back to the window, his eyes burning into hers, he shifted his grip upon the linen table-cloth, preparing to make a sudden spring. Malena, intently watching his every move, saw a great body loom up in the window-frame, balance, and drop noiselessly into the room. One catlike bound and it was upon Pilar from behind, one hand over the bandit's mouth, pressing sharply back, the other shoving against his forehead. A sharp crack, and that which had been Colonel Pilar slid limply to the floor between his slayer's hands.

Malena snatched up one of the candles and raised it till its rays fell full on her rescuer's face. Then, with a little cry, she fell at his feet, sobbing—

"Harry, Harry!"

CHAPTER VIII

DISGUISES

CULVER'S heart beat wildly with emotion, but his brain was clear and calm. Raising the girl tenderly, he held her close for an instant, then spoke with swift earnestness.

"We must get out of here at once, before they find us with this dead rat. Leave all the talking to me; just pull yourself together and keep close."

He knelt by Pilar's body, and in a few seconds had stripped the Mexican of his high boots. Glancing about the room, he found the dead man's sombrero and long cloak hanging over a bracket-chandelier on the wall. Quickly he kicked off his own shoes and stamped his feet into the tall riding-boots with their monstrous spurs, pulled the wide, gold-laced hat down over his forehead, and threw the cloak about him, wrapping its folds about his chin and mouth, after the manner of most male Mexicans who thus protect themselves from breathing the poisonous night-air. As she watched him, Malena shuddered, so closely did he resemble, in this effective disguise, the evil man whom he had just killed.

"Take my arm," he directed briefly.

Together they passed through the corridor and into the *patio* beyond, Culver smiling grimly as the tatterdemalion soldiers in the courtyard sprang to attention.

"The stables," he whispered to Malena; and she led the way to an adobe outbuilding.

The lounging troopers at the stable-door, seeing, as they supposed, their commanding officer and his guest, leaped to their feet and saluted.

"Our horses, my children," Culver commanded, imitating, in his best Spanish, the booming bass of the late Colonel Pilar.

"*Si, señor coronel.*"

Two of them disappeared into the stable; the sound of stamping horses and of crackling Mexican oaths arose. As he stood waiting, Culver was aware that Malena's arm was trembling on his own. Not with fear, he was sure; for after the happenings of the last week he knew that this girl did not lack courage. She had been through enough danger and suffering to justify fear in a brave man, but fear seemed to have been left out of her nature. No, it was the nervous shock of the last few moments which had shaken her. And, reviewing the swift, kaleidoscopic events of the twenty-four hours past, Culver did not wonder.

He was afraid, however. Fear for her, should the Mexicans see through his disguise; sheer terror of the horrors which would rush upon her, if the chance discovery of the body in the room they had just left should bring the *rancheros* swarming about them.

In a moment his fears were dispelled. The

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troopers brought out their horses, saddled and bridled: the gray Malena had stolen from Fortescue, and a splendid black which had belonged to Pilar.

"We return at dawn," Culver told the soldiers, as the two fugitives mounted and rode off.

Dazed as she was with the swiftness of what had happened, Malena kept pace with him in silence for nearly half an hour. At last, looking up at the stars, she realized that they were riding south.

"Where are you taking me?" she asked in astonishment.

"Toward the Mexican lines," he answered briefly.

"You are going to let me go to Santa Anna?"

"That is impossible, Malena. You will see soon enough what I am going to do. Wait till we can talk to better advantage."

For about five miles they rode, not keeping to the main track and avoiding showing themselves on the skyline. Suddenly, after winding up the slopes of a long sand-hill, they reached the crest and saw, glowing redly in the distance, the camp-fires of a numerous host.

"This is far enough," he warned her. "Those fires confirm the presence of the *rancheros* at Encarnacion. There sleeps the army of Santa Anna. Tomorrow morning he will break camp and march north to meet Taylor."

Carefully, with a soldier's eye, he took in the sweep of flickering flame-points on the sandy plain below.

"Between eighteen and twenty thousand," he said aloud. "Pilar spoke the truth."

At the name, Malena shuddered in her saddle and dropped the reins which she had gathered up as if for a sudden dash.

"The odds will be heavy enough in favor of your countrymen," continued Culver, on whom her action was not lost, "without the information which, of course, I can not let you give them. You know that yourself."

"Oh, I know!" she cried, the emotion of the last hour finding outlet in a rush of words. "You trusted me, and I betrayed you. You loved me, and I used your love against you and your people. You saved me from worse than death, and I deceived you to bring death and ruin upon you. You deserved from me all that was good, and received nothing but evil. Now I have lost your love, forfeited your respect, and earned the penalty of the ingrate and the spy. Do with me what you will; no punishment is too great. But before you judge me consider what drove me to my acts. You know who I am—you heard more than enough from that imbecile Fortescue. As for what I have done, you must have heard that from my own lips, for if you had not overheard all that happened there at Encarnacion, you would not have known of my danger.

"Can you not see that I, a Mexican woman, love my country as much as you love yours? That I would do as much for Mexico as you would for your United States? I am a spy. Have you no spies in your own service? Do you not honor the memory of Nathan Hale? Suppose you were a Mexican, that you saw your country overrun by a powerful foe. Would you not do all in your power, at any sacrifice, to save her? Would any deceit, any lie, be too great. Would any shame be too bitter if your country's liberty lay in the balance?

"I do not say this to win back your love, for I know I have forfeited that. But you have risked your life to save mine, and you have the right to know why I imperiled yours, why I deceived you, and it is my right to make you see all that I did was for a sacred purpose. I want you to think well of me, even though you can never forgive me."

"I know all this and I understand," Culver answered gently. "But some things I do not understand—yet. I know now what I only half believed before: that on the very night we met you came to my room and saw the report which I later delivered to General Taylor. But you could not have known that I was at work on that report. What brought you to my quarters?"

"You must have heard me tell Pilar," Malena replied, "that the wealth of my family, converted into jewels, lay hidden in the house we formerly occupied. My uncle and I between us own that entire block. My father was born in the Casa Miranda, and my uncle still occupies the Casa Miramon. That night I met you, I intended to visit my old home and get the jewels—you know for what purpose. I entered the Casa Miranda unseen by your soldiers, went directly to the room that had

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been my father's study, where the gems were hidden, and found you there, asleep. The jewels had been concealed in a niche in the wall; but a heavy wardrobe had been moved in front of the niche, and I could not budge it.

"It was maddening to have come so far and be balked by a stupid piece of furniture. Oh, if I had only the strength of a man! Then I went over to have a look at you as you slept, and read the papers on your desk."

"Then, when you came to inspect the battery and your aunt fell ill—or did she?"

"She really did, poor dear. But I was planning to have a slight sunstroke of my own and be left to recover in your room—and under my skirt I had a lever to pry the wardrobe away from the wall. But I found it already moved and the niche exposed. I drew out the marble slab, which is very easy to move if you know just how and where to press down on it, unlocked the strong-box built into the wall beneath it, took out the jewels and slid back the bottom of the niche before you returned."

Culver thought of Fales's discomfiture and smiled to himself.

"I see," he observed. "But how did you obtain entrance on your first visit?"

"Having heard all that I told Pilar," she responded, "you know that these clothes I wear are the outward symbol of my commission as Captain Hidalgo, in the army of Mexico. As far as a woman may be, I am a trained soldier. My father taught me, that I might take the place of the son he prayed for but never had.

"We returned to Mexico when General Santa Anna became President in 1841, and that year my father died, as he had long hoped to, on Mexican soil. I followed Santa Anna when he was forced by the traitor Herrera to seek refuge in Havana. Acting under his authorization and as his agent, I conferred with Mr. Fales, the confidential agent of your Mr. Polk, at a secret meeting in one of the abandoned houses in our family's block in Monterey. When I returned from that conference to the Casa Miramon, and had changed back into my own clothes and character, I remembered having seen the great holes battered through the partition-walls on the upper floor of the block, and thought I might be able to get to the Casa Miranda and the jewels in that way. There was no breach in the wall of the casa itself but from next door I got to your room by way of the balcony and the corridor."

Culver revised his opinion of the intelligence of Zebulon P. Fales.

"And you inspected the American forces and equipment in the rôle of Miss Fortescue," he mused. "Was that also done on the authorization of Santa Anna? It seems rather above his intelligence."

"You do him wrong," Malena protested warmly. "General Santa Anna is a man of genius—the Napoleon of the West. But it was not really his idea, though it was done with his approval. As you know, I lived in England and knew Madeline Fortescue. I used to play with her and her brother Gregory when we were children together in Hawarden. So I thought it would be a good idea to take her name and pretend that Gregory had gone to America and enlisted in your army. In that way I could have access to the American lines and see as much as I wanted to, and I did. The last man I wanted or expected to see in your ranks was the real Gregory Fortescue. How could I have dreamed the wretch actually had run away and enlisted in the American army? When you found him and brought us together, I knew that he would give me away, and was forced to escape."

"But why did you run that risk of meeting some one that knew you, by playing the game so long? Why did you not slip away as soon as you had got what you wanted at Monterey?"

"Would Miss Fortescue have been allowed to move without an escort? How could I have overpowered that escort—oh, those poor, brave dragoons—by myself? Miñon's lancers were there to meet me, as prearranged. And then came you and your battery, out of the Gate of the Dead."

"That's why she struggled against me!" exclaimed Culver to himself. "Good Lord! What a blind ass I've been!" Aloud he asked her, "But your credentials—your letter from General Scott?"

"Your General Scott can not deny anything to a woman who flatters him. My story deceived him completely, and he wrote me that letter with all the good-will of his honest, kindly, foolish heart."

"But he would not have been deceived but for your letter from the American minister," Culver insisted. "How did you obtain that?"

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"Forged," said Malena calmly. "I traced the signature myself."

"And the stationery of the legation? Was that genuine?"

"Yes. It was stolen by one of our London agents."

"You are as clever as you are brave," said Culver. "It is your courage, though, which I admire most of all. You were able to play out your game with me, pretending to love me, and enduring my attentions, in order to use me for the advantage of Mexico."

She sank her face into her hands with a little sob.

"Oh Harry, my Harry! Can't you understand that I really loved you, that I do love you as much as a woman can love? That was never pretense. I was horribly unlucky. If I could have escaped loving you, it would have been so much easier. Do you think I enjoyed deceiving you? I loathed myself every moment. And today, when I left you to the *rancheros* and thought you had been killed, I wanted only to die. But what I could I do? Mexico is my country. Would you have been proud of me, could you have loved me, if I had betrayed my country for you? Wouldn't you rather have had me do just as I have done?"

Bringing his horse beside hers, Culver reached over, lifted her to his breast and kissed her tenderly.

"Brave little woman-soldier!" he murmured. "Now that I know, I love you all the more for your loyalty. You have been faithful to your cause through everything, through trials that few women or few men could have endured. But I have a duty, too, as high as your own. Through no fault of yours, you have failed. You came near causing the destruction of our armies, and it was the fortune of war that I have been able to prevent it. Now, knowing yourself what duty is, you can understand that I cannot possibly let you go to Santa Anna. I must take you back to Aguas Nuevas, lest your information bring about our ruin. You understand?"

"Yes, Harry," she replied. "I am your prisoner, and you must take me back. If I could have escaped, I should have done so before now. There is only one thing more you can do for me, and that is, let me be shot instead of hanged."

"My God!" he cried, crushing her to him and utterly oblivious of the danger of rousing whatever Mexican patrols might be within earshot. "They shall do neither! You are in uniform—a prisoner of war!"

"I am a spy," she answered steadily, "and have earned a spy's death."

"You shall not suffer it," he swore, "if I have to shoot you myself and then blow my brains out. But listen: I can take you back in your disguise as Captain Hidalgo and report that I discovered you outside our lines, pursued and caught you, and have made you prisoner. You would then be released on your own parole until the impending battle is over, and your information is no longer useful. The trouble is, you came to Aguas Nuevas as Madeline Fortescue, and your flight will have been discovered by now. When your adopted brother Gregory tells what he knows, General Wool may put two and two together, realize that Miss Fortescue and Captain Hidalgo are the same person, and that one person——"

"A spy," Malena finished the sentence for him. "But my absence is probably as unknown now as it was the moment before I fled. Madre Concepcion, whose devotion to Mexico is as great as my own, has my instructions to tell any one who inquires for me that I am confined to my room with a cold and fever, as a result of exposure on the road from Monterey."

Culver breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"I can then report your capture to General Wool, smuggle you back into the convent, and produce you later in your own dress as Miss Fortescue, or as Captain Hidalgo. As for Gregory Fortescue, he was half drunk when he saw you and next door to a wine-shop, and is probably in no condition to tell what he knows. But now, my dearest, we must ride back as fast as horseflesh can carry us. General Wool must know of Santa Anna's advance before it is too late."

"But my jewels!" Malena protested. "What is to become of them? And what if I should be recaptured by our troops? I am still a Mexican, Harry, in spite of my love for you; and I must do whatever I can, no matter what it costs."

"If you are recaptured, your parole no longer binds you. As for your jewels, they are your property, and I have neither the right nor the wish to prevent you from using them as you think best. After the battle, you are free to go where you wish,

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making whatever disposal of them you desire. I will answer to General Taylor. Now we must go."

With a final kiss, he replaced her on her horse and wheeled his own. Malena looked down at the myriad camp-fires starring the desert below and cried with a superb gesture of farewell:

"*Adios, Santanna!* You do not need my aid to conquer!"

Then off they rode, back across the desert toward the American camp. Culver did not spare his horse, for victory or defeat hung on each moment of time. Malena, her own mount refreshed by his rest and corn at Encarnacion, kept pace nobly. Through the starlit dark they sped, reeling off the miles of desert and mountain road, till the first light of the coming dawn brought them to the American lines.

Straight to headquarters Culver took his prisoner, through the still sleeping camp, and reported at once to General Wool whom they found washing his face in a bucket outside his tent.

"Well done, sir," the old veteran complimented Culver. "I accept your responsibility for Captain Hidalgo. You may take him to your own quarters. Or—" as he observed Culver's jaw drop—"take him to the devil! But look out for him. He looks slippery. And now, captain, you're as tireless as an Indian, but you need sleep. You have from now till noon. That's all."

The sun was rising and the yawning buglers and drummers turning out for reveille when they reached the convent again, and Culver hammered with his sword-hilt on the bolted door. The portress came and went back to notify the Mother Superior.

"Hide your uniform where it won't be found by any one but yourself," he said to Malena. "Make yourself as completely Miss Fortescue again as possible, and rest. Once the army hears a battle is coming, both you and Captain Hidalgo will be forgotten. And now—good-by. I will not see you again, I fear."

Standing on the topmost stair, she bent down and kissed him.

"Good-by, Harry dear, and think of me always. No matter what happens to one or both of us, never forget, never doubt, that I love you."

He clasped her hands, then, as Madre Concepcion, her face as stolid as ever, opened the door, he kissed them and strode away.

"Good-by indeed, bravest of women," he murmured. "And forever. There is only one way out of this tangle, and the chance of battle will open it to me."

CHAPTER IX

RETREAT

AT THE first notes of reveille, Trooper Smith-Fortescue raised his head from the guard-house floor, and then carefully set it back again. For twenty-four hours after the provost-guard picked him up in the back room of the Tearful Virgin he had been dead to the world. Then he had tried to sit up and tried to think. Both things made his head ache, in addition to the regulation punishment for having been on a mixed mescal and pulque drunk the night before. And there are no words—of tongue or pen—fit to describe a mescal-and-pulque head.

Yet, all night long, Smith-Fortesque had been deliberately aggravating it, trying to remember something that had happened between drinks on the night before. Something about an officer and a girl—a girl he knew. But Smith had known many girls and Fortescue many more. He was running down the list, when. . . .

Reveille had stopped, unfinished, and the dragoon trumpeters were sounding "Boots and Saddle!" Down in the infantry lines, the drummers were thundering out the long roll.

Howls of pure joy came from the camp of Ben McCulloch's Texas Rangers, and an angrier roar from Yell's Arkansas Cavalry who had just learned what had befallen their comrades at Encarnacion. Smith-Fortescue, of course, did not know this last detail, but neither did he know that he still had a headache. He only wanted to know—and so did every other howling, dancing, door-rattling inmate of the cells—if he could get out and into the fight.

"Turn out the guard!" shouted the sentry on Post Number One. "Officer of the day!"

"Never mind the guard!" The officer of the day rode up and purposely spoke in a voice that carried to the inmost cell of the now silent and anxious guard-house. "Detail every prisoner to help load wagons. If they finish loading the grain before Santa Anna gets here, release all the hard workers and let them fight!"

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Santa Anna was coming! No company-street rumor, this time, but straight from the officer of the day. Bring on your grain-wagons, and then bring on your Mexicans.

Smith-Fortescue did not know that there was a girl in the world.

CULVER slept soundly till noon, through all the noises of an armed camp tearing itself up by the roots, and then was awaked by the respectful scratching of O'Brien's finger-nail on the tent-flap.

"Shame on ye!" said the lieutenant reproachfully, as he entered. "To be after chasing a poor little Mexican thirty-five miles across the desert—and then steal his boots. Captain dear, if ye wear those patent-leather atrocities into action, ye'll be shot for a Greaser."

"Can't help it," replied Culver, pulling on the high, ornate riding-boots Pilar had died in. "I left my only other pair back in Encarnacion. Any news from those parts?"

"There is that. McCulloch's Rangers came tearin' in from the south an hour since, havin' met up with Santa Anna mid-between. They tell me was ridin' in a chariot av war—whatever that is—drawn be eight horses, with hussars before and cuirassiers behind, like Napoleon in all his glory. I niver knew a Texas Ranger had that much education.

"Then in came May and his dragoons—he's been off scouting to the east since you left us, captain dear—with the news that ould Miñon with two thousand of his iverlastin' lancers is sweepin' round through Las Palomas to cut us off from Saltillo.

"I was at headquarters when May came jinglin' an' swaggerin' in—and you twelve hours ahead av him with the rale news. Ould Wool batted niver an eye, but started iv'rybody south, growlin' an' swearin' at their havin' to run away from any amount av Greasers. This is th' last tent still standing', but ye've just time to shave, and a plate av hot slap-jacks an' bacon will be along when ye're through."

"Many thanks, old man," said Culver, lathering his two-days' beard. "By the way, has Miss Fortescue found her brother yet?"

"She told me this morning she'd had word of him in Saltillo," answered O'Brien.

"This morning! When did you see her?"

"As she was startin' south in the ambulance, with May, bad luck to him, ridin' beside the off wheel. And niver a sight of her have I had these two days. That ould witch—I mean the Holy Mother Superior—said she was down with a chill. She's to stop at the Rancho San Juan de Buena Vista, tonight."

"The Mother Superior?"

"Miss Fortescue, av course. She's to stop there till it's safe for her to push on to Saltillo."

"She would, of course," said Culver, half to himself.

The rancho was only a mile and a half south of the chosen position at La Angostura on which the army was now rapidly falling back. There, from the stout-walled old ranch-house, Malena could watch the coming battle, waiting for Santa Anna to win through and set her free, like a gallant knight and his lady fair. Culver, who knew whole chapters of "Ivanhoe" by heart, thought of this simile and decided grimly that the gallant knight was going to have a devil of a time getting past D Battery.

"Could I have a look at that prisoner av yours, captain dear?" asked O'Brien suddenly. "Where's the spalpeen taken himself to?"

"Buena Vista," replied Culver.

CHAPTER X

BUENA VISTA

Santanna boasted loudly that, before six hours were past,
His lancers through Saltillo would pursue us, fierce and fast;
On came his solid infantry, line marching after line,
Lo! their great standards in the sun like sheets of silver shine.

Lo! galloping upon the right, four thousand lances gleam,
As glittering in the morning air, their blood-red pennants stream,
And here his stern artillery climbs up the dark plateau,
Today he means to strike at us an overwhelming blow.

—*Pike's "Battle of Buena Vista."*

"HOW the divvle," demanded O'Brien, "are we goin' to hold three-quarters av a mile av front against ten, or it might be fifteen, thousand rampin' wild Mexicans, with nawthin' but D Battery, a rifle battalion, and a milishy regiment?"

"Not a regiment," corrected Culver, "eight companies."

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Shading his eyes with the hardtack he had been knocking the maggots out of, preparatory to breakfast, O'Brien looked directly into the face of the rising sun and counted the companies of the Second Indiana, on the left of Culver's Battery. The count was easy, as no two of them were uniformed alike.

"Eight only. They've detached the two wing companies and j'ined thim to those av the Third to make the battalion av light troops up there in lonely solitude under the sunrise. Grand support we have, captain dear—eight little milishy companies, averagin' forty-sivin brave min apiece."

"Exactly," agreed Culver. "Good men, brave men, quarter-trained, with no more cohesion than a basket of chips, and a political colonel."

"'Tis Jeff Davis and his Mississippi lads should be with us now, instead av playin' pussy-wants-a-corner with Miñon, down Saltillo way."

Culver made no reply to the lieutenant's last observation; he was too busy studying the details of the American position, facing south across the narrowest point of Buena Vista pass. Before and behind them ran many deep, steep-walled *barrancas* or gullies, scooped out by the water rushing down from the eastern hills during the rainy season. Now, at the height of the dry season, the *barrancas* were brown and dusty, as was the bed of the little stream that ran almost due north and south on the western side of the pass. The Saltillo-Aguas Nuevas road, squeezing its way between the bank of the stream and the foot of the long eastern slope, dived into one end and out the other of a long, narrow gulch called by the Mexicans "La Angostura."

There Washington's Battery was stationed, its guns emplaced behind a stone parapet and trained down the road. Bragg's Battery was to the right of it, Sherman's to the left, and each of the three supported by two regiments of State infantry, with the mounted volunteers and two troops of the First Dragoons in reserve. The contrast between this and the weakly defended left or eastern end of the line was glaring.

"La Angostura," muttered Culver, "is undoubtedly the key of the position, to be held as such. But——"

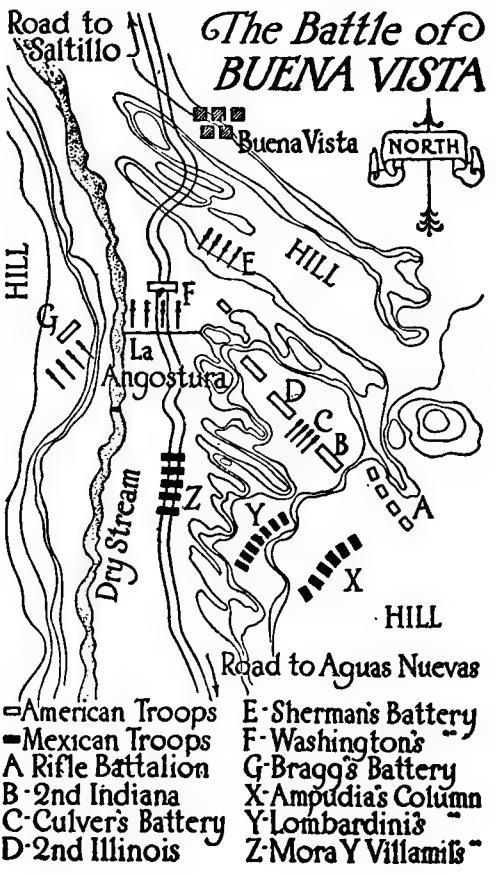
"But," finished the sympathetic O'Brien, "what's the use av holdin' the key, after the door itself has been kicked off the hinges?"

Higher rose the sun, burning away the thick white mist and revealing the dark masses of Mexican troops who thronged the southern end of the valley. On a hill just out of cannon-shot, a group of gold-laced uniforms caught O'Brien's eye.

"Santa Anna and his staff, no less," he commented. "If he can see us as plainly as we can see him, he'll be striking us hereabouts, I'm thinking."

"By the way his fellows are moving," answered Culver, busy with his field-glasses, "they'll strike us simultaneously along the whole front."

Gradually the greater part of the Mexican army was formed in three columns of attack, which moved forward together. Up the road on the western side of the valley marched the heavy infantry of Mora y Villamil, brave in their full-dress uniforms of red and green, with flying colors and cadenced step, as if they were on parade in Mexico City instead of walking into the man-trap set for them at La Angostura.



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Across the valley, Ampudia's light troops skirmished along the upper slope of the eastern hills. Between the two came the main attack: eight thousand picked infantry under Lombardini, supported by two thousand lancers, and heading straight for the Second Indiana and Culver's Battery.

Now the Mexican artillery opened to cover the advance. Its guns were quaint old relics of colonial Spain, mounted on ponderous wooden carriages and firing cannon-balls of pure copper—an unconsidered by-product of the silver mines. One of these solid shot, fired from a sixteen-pounder of the vintage of 1768, came slowly and majestically through the air, in the direction of the Second Indiana, who opened their ranks and cheered as the missile passed through.

Being used to that sort of thing in their own revolutionary fighting, where both sides would often entrench just out of musket-shot and then trundle perfectly harmless cannon-balls at each other for weeks, the Mexican infantry came shoulder to shoulder, regardless of the little American six-pounders in their front. They did not know that those little six-pounders were the Walter Johnsons of the smooth-bore league.

The Guanajuato Regiment, at the head of Lombardini's column, was seven hundred yards from him when Culver rose in his stirrups and commanded:

"On a line-of-metal, aim! Number One, fire!"

Through the thick-packed length of the Guanajuato Regiment the cannon-ball tore its way, killing ten men outright, horribly wounding four others, and covering those beside them with blood and fragments of mangled flesh.

"Number Two, fire! Number Three, fire! Number Four, fire!"

Three more red paths of death had been opened before the first one closed. And while the echoes of the fourth shot were still reverberating, Number One gun had been run up into place again, sponged, loaded, primed and pointed, ready for the next discharge.

"Their cannon are empty, my children!" shouted the colonel of the Guanajuatos, a gallant old veteran of the War of Independence. "It will be many minutes before they can fire again! Forward! Forward! *Viva Mejico!*"

Closing its ranks, the regiment dashed forward, cheering, confident in its leader's assurance. Then out of the smoke before them flamed a second salvo—a third—a fourth.

This time, the brave old colonel said nothing, for he was lying dead beneath his disemboweled horse. Culver, holding his battery's fire to let the smoke lift, saw through the thinning powder-reek the Guanajuato Regiment break and shred away, the panic-struck conscripts running back down the flanks of the rest of the long column, which still came on sturdily.

Racked with round shot, lashed with case and shrapnel, Lombardini's men at last came within musket range of the American line. They were informed of this by a well-aimed volley poured into them by the Second Indiana.

Instead of pushing on with the bayonet against the slender line, the head of the great column halted, spread out to left and right behind the sheltering bank of a handy barranca, and fired back. Though they had ten flintlocks to the Hoosiers' one, the Mexicans' guns were worn-out Tower muskets, condemned and sold for old iron by the British Army, while the Americans were armed with the latest model turned out by the Springfield Arsenal. Thanks to their better weapons, good marksmanship, and native courage, the Second Indiana, raw militiamen in their first battle, stood their ground and bit their cartridges, loaded, primed and fired together, like veteran regulars.

The best shot in B Company forgot to withdraw his ramrod and shot it away like an arrow, sending a nerve-steadying roar of laughter down the line.

Men were dropping fast under the musketry from the masses before them and the enfilading fire of a battery of Mexican eight-pounders on the left. But their comrades closed up steadily, the sergeants rectifying the dressing as if this were drill on the armory floor.

So it continued for twenty minutes. Culver, his battery flailing the long column that writhed without advancing, like a snake with its head crushed, knew that his guns were getting hot and his caissons emptying fast. But he was well content; the enemy were being checked and his own supports were doing better than he had dared hope.

Then came a tremendous crash of cannon and musketry, followed by a great roar of

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cheering from the right. Out of the trap of La Angostura fled the fragments of the gay column of Mora y Villamil, crushed by the converging fire of Bragg's, Washington's, and Sherman's Batteries. The fugitives ran for shelter into the mouths of the nearest barrancas or diagonally across the valley toward Lombardini's column, which slowly began to give ground.

"We've got them on the run, captain!" General Lane, commanding the two Indiana regiments, rode up to Culver, looking as if he had already received his party's nomination for governor. "Advance your battery across the first barranca at once!"

Without hesitation or comment, and with full knowledge of the almost suicidal risk involved, Culver obeyed. Little Schwartz, the trumpeter, waited only for a look of confirmation from his captain to blow the call that brought the teams thundering up from the rear and through the line of smoking guns.

Swiftly the four pieces were swung round and limbered up; forward dashed the battery to the edge of the broad barranca and over it, down one steep, crumbling slope and up the other, the gunners straining at the wheel-spokes, the horses scrambling like cats. Across the bullet-swept plateau they raced, unlimbered and went into action a scant two hundred yards from Lombardini's milling, hesitating ten thousand.

As if awed by the audacity of the advance and the—to them—amazing mobility of the Flying Artillery, the huge mass of Mexican bayonets and lances actually wavered and gave ground. Now was the time for a charge by the Second Indiana. Eagerly Culver looked back and saw the militia regiment crumbling to pieces and drifting away to the rear.

Their colonel afterward denied, on oath at the court-martial, having ordered the retreat. None denied that he made no attempt to check it. His lieutenant-colonel did try and succeeded in rallying some of the men round the colors. Let this be written in their favor, also, that many more of them fought through the rest of the action, individually and bravely. But as a regiment, the Second Indiana had ceased to be; if indeed, they had ever been one. A wide gap yawned in the American line, and with a roar of delight Lombardini's thousands surged forward on Culver's Battery, left utterly unsupported in their path.

"PASS prolonge!" commanded Culver, his voice rising clear and comforting above all other sounds. "By sections, to the rear, retire firing!"

Covered by a round of grape from Sergeant Peabody's section, O'Brien's gunners cast off the prolonge-ropes belayed round the trail-cleats, and hooked on the looped end of each line to its proper limber, which sped to the rear, dragging the piece after it like a toy on the end of a string.

Leaving a dead cannoneer and three dying horses behind, O'Brien's section won through to the far side of the barranca, halted, and blazed away at the swarm of Mexicans closing in on Peabody's section. With the old orderly sergeant and four other men, two of them wounded, on the prolonge rope, two staggering horses in the traces and a dying driver lashing them on, Number Three gun was somehow dragged to the barranca and tumbled in. A caisson team dashed forward, hooked on, and brought the piece safely back to the line.

Every man and horse attached to Number Four was shot down before the gun had been dragged a rod. But, as the exulting Mexicans closed in on their prize, from the huddle of dead rose a sturdy, staggering figure that lurched to the breech of the six-pounder, rested one hand on the cascabel, raised the other on high, and brought it down with a ringing shout of "Scotland forever!"

Before the first bayonet could reach him, the gun was spiked and Sergeant Donald McNab was dead.

The other three guns of Culver's Battery fell back to their original positions, but no further. The regiment on their right, the Second Illinois, stood fast. Loading their flintlocks as they came, the Louisville Legion double-quicked over from the rear of La Angostura and formed a new line running north and south, at right angles to the old one, and with Culver's Battery clamping the joint at the angle.

Desperately the Americans strove to save themselves from being outflanked by Lombardini's men, now across the barranca and pouring northward through the hole left unplugged by the Second Indiana. Four rifle companies, that had been holding the upper eastern slopes at the far left of the original American line, were now cut off by Lombardini's column. As the riflemen fell back, Ampudia's swarming skirmishers at

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their heels, two scant squadrons of Arkansas and Kentucky cavalry, less than three hundred sabers strong, charged, drove in and checked the head of the huge Mexican column for seven priceless minutes.

Then the mounted volunteers were hurled back with heavy loss, but they had given the four rifle companies time to slip round and rejoin the rest of the American army. This was now formed like the letter L, reversed, with the long limb running north and south, and constantly extending itself as Lombardini's column, reinforced now by Ampudia's light troops, pushed on further and further northward, confident of eventually turning the invaders' flank, which it was evident could not be thrown out much further.

Two guns from Sherman's Battery, two more from Bragg's, the Third Indiana, grimly resolved to redeem the name of their State; every man and gun available had been hurried to the new line. But they were not enough. Their flank rested on thin air, and round it curled the head of Lombardini's column, pouring down from east to west to take the hard-pressed Americans in the rear.

Then, up the slope from the Saltillo road came a few hundred men in worn gray uniforms, a handful of blue dragoons, and an old man in a frock coast of faded green.

"'Tis the Mississippi Rifles!" cried O'Brien, as the sharp crack of the Whitney rang through the roar of musketry.

"It's Taylor, thank God!" thought Culver, as he watched the whole line stiffen and thrill, now that Old Rough and Ready was here again.

The head of Lombardini's column jerked itself back; unable to advance further in the face of the Mississipians' deadly marksmanship, the Mexican infantry stood their ground and fired back sturdily.

But their cavalry, the two thousand lancers with the column, fetched a wide circuit round the Rifles' flank and swept, to Culver's horror and dismay, straight down on the Rancho San Juan de la Buena Vista—and Malena.

AN HOUR before dawn, Malena had risen from her rawhide couch in the room Colonel May had secured for her in the ranch-house, freshened her travel-weary body with a sponge bath, and boldly put on the black-and-silver uniform of Captain Hidalgo. As she finished the hardtack and coffee brought and left by an orderly outside her bolted door, the firing began. Presently she saw, through the slats of the Venetian blinds, the stragglers and runaways slinking in from the battle-field.

"The whole army's cut to pieces!" howled a big volunteer who had thrown away his musket and almost everything else except his voice. "Lane's killed and Taylor's killed, and there's fifty thousand Mexicans right behind us!"

"Culver's Battery's gone!" cried another calamity howler. "All four guns captured and everybody killed!"

Malena heard. The man was so close to the window that she could see a little mole with three white hairs in it, just behind his right ear. She noticed that detail and, for the rest of her life, wondered how she could have done so when she learned that Harry was dead. Then the thought came that she was free to escape and fight for Mexico. "*Viva Mejico!*"

"Boys, where did that come from?"

She had cried it aloud, that war-cry of her country, in the very ears of the worst riffraff of the American camp.

"Bust in them blinds!"

A musket-butt crashed through the flimsy shutters, another battered the bolted door. Malena was trapped and weaponless. A lock of her hair fell down across her forehead and she tucked it hastily up again under the sombrero. Better be killed as a man than be spared as a woman, now. Bidding for a bullet, she cried again—

"*Viva Mejico!*"

"*Viva Mejico!*" came an answering roar from two thousand throats, as, with thundering hoofs and leveled lances, the squadrons of Torrejon charged down from the eastern hills to capture the rancho.

Before them, stragglers and camp-followers bolted like rabbits, hiding under the canvas covers and running-gear of the parked wagons, or barricading themselves in the 'dobe ranch-house and thick-walled outbuildings. After them came the swarming lancers, thrusting their long spears into every cranny, or unslinging their blunderbuss-like *trabucos* and blazing away from the saddle. From the upper windows and the flat-topped, parapetted roofs, the small camp-guard and many of the armed stragglers fired down on the mass of cavalry

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packed tight in the narrow, street-like spaces between the houses.

Throwing wide the broken shutters, Malena waved a welcome to her countrymen as they rode gallantly up. A handsome young officer reined in his mount, waved back to her with a laugh, and crumpled out of the saddle with a bullet through his heart.

Malena sprang from the window, her arms outstretched, too late to catch him as he fell. Standing over him, she whipped the heavy horse-pistol out of one of his saddle-holsters, leveled, and fired it before the sniper who had killed the officer could dodge behind the parapet of the stable roof. Instead, he dropped his musket, pitched forward, and fell screaming down on a clump of waiting lance-points.

Stooping, Malena kissed the dead boy tenderly on the forehead, unbuckled his sword-belt and rebuckled it about her own waist, took the sword from his lifeless fingers and sprang to the saddle, ready to pay her part in the grim game of war. She was her father's daughter; few officers in the Mexican army of that day were her equal in spirit, training, and soldierly instinct.

"Permit me to congratulate the *Señor Capitán* on his so deadly marksmanship," said a swarthy officer in a gold lace uniform trimmed sparsely with plain cloth.

"*Gracias, mi General,*" replied Malena, recognizing Torrejon, commanding the brigade. "But while we linger here at the rancho, skirmishing with a few wretches on the housetops, the lancers of Juvera may be charging down on the rear of the Yankee batteries! Shall Juvera have all the glory?"

"Never!" roared Torrejon, whose love for his brother-brigadier was as Cain's for Abel. "Let us get clear of these cursed houses and then— *Dios!* Here come the dragoons of May!"

They came: two troops of the First and two of the Second Dragoons, with all Yell's Arkansas Cavalry whooping at their heels. They gave the lancers no time to get up momentum nor room to use their unhandy weapons, but hit them with a battering-ram of dusty blue and flashing steel.

For five minutes the Rancho San Juan de la Buena Vista was a cavalryman's dream of Heaven; other people might have called it a nightmare of hell. It was certainly no place for a lady.

But Malena was in the thick of it, crossing swords with a big dragoon. Her father had been the best swordsman in the Kingdom of New Spain, and for ten years she had been his pupil. Her slender wrist was supple and strong. Deftly she parried the ponderous saber with her own light blade, ran the dragoon through the forearm, and disarmed him with a sharp counter.

Her point was at his throat when their eyes met and she recognized her old playfellow, Gregory Fortescue. As she lowered her weapon, a rallying rush of the lancers drove the two apart. Fortescue dropped the first man with his dragoon pistol, and then got the second lancer's point through his left lung.

As the fight hung in the balance, two guns of the ubiquitous Flying Artillery—Reynolds' section of Sherman's Battery—galloped up and settled the business with two rounds of grape.

Back fled the beaten lancers of Torrejon to where Lombardini's weary infantry still held the eastern slope of the valley. They had good cause to be weary, those patient, plodding conscripts, who had marched two hundred and forty miles over a burning desert, starved and thirsted for twenty-four hours, and then fought like heroes from dawn to noon. Small wonder that now they were getting sick of being shot down from afar by the Americans' better guns, and were steadily trickling from the line and seeking shelter in the depths of the too-handy barrancas.

Something must be done, Malena realized, to check this demoralization before it went further. Coolly studying the American line, she recognized certain acquaintances, came to a conclusion, and rode up to where General Lombardini and his staff sat in their saddles, trying their best to look like a steel engraving of Napoleon and his marshals.

To Captain Hidalgo, whom he knew to be the confidential agent of Santa Anna, Lombardini hearkened attentively.

"My general, it is the long rifles of the *Mississippianos* that gall your brave soldiers so unbearably. But those riflemen can not withstand a charge of cavalry, for they have no bayonets."

"You are sure of this, *Señor Capitán?*"

"Disguised, I rode past them at the Gate of the Dead," replied Malena, "and there was not one bayonet in all the regiment.

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They are volunteers, and their colonel a politician—a Senator of the United States." She was not aware that Jefferson Davis was also a West Pointer and an ex-officer of dragoons.

"Then, in God's name, let me ride down and stick the pigs!" cried the carefully impetuous General Juvera, whose brigade of lancers had not yet seen anything sufficiently tempting to charge at.

Lombardini nodded, and presently an imposing column of cavalry was galloping down the broad bed of a long barranca that descended like a chute from the top of the eastern slope and debouched directly in front of the center of the Mississippians' line. A lance-length ahead of them all rode Malena, her cheeks crimson with rage and shame. Mindful of the jewels she bore, and their incalculable worth to Mexico's empty war-chest, she had repressed her life-long wish to ride in a cavalry charge and stood aside while the column was forming, till a sneering word from the swaggering Juvera sent her spurring to the front.

Reckless of the guns before her, the stampeding mass of horsemen behind, and the slippery, rock-strewn slope beneath, she rode on like a valkyr. Now she was halfway down the ravine, and could recognize the erect, spare figure of Colonel Davis as he rode back and forth, forming his men into—was it a hollow square? No, it was a wedge—a broad wedge with the point turned *away* from the oncoming horsemen. In this strange formation stood the riflemen, motionless and without firing a shot.

As Malena dashed out of the mouth of the barranca, she suddenly sensed a difference in the hoof-beats behind her. Turning in the saddle, she saw the now pale-faced Juvera tugging at his reins, pulling his mount down to a trot, to a walk, to a standstill. Awed by the silent, waiting line before them, the whole column of cavalry actually slowed to a halt in the very jaws of the wedge.

"Fools! Fools!" cried Malena at the top of her voice. "On! On! It is your only chance!"

As she called back over her shoulder, her horse tripped on a rolling stone and brought them both down, sprawling, in the sand. Over them as they lay there crashed the terrible volley of the Mississippi Rifles that blew Juvera's column to rags and made Jefferson Davis the idol of the South.

Remounting under cover of the smoke, Malena turned her horse's head and rode back, not up the now corpse-choked ravine, but diagonally up the long eastern slope. Behind her, she saw not only the Mississippians but the whole cheering American line advancing, horse, foot, and guns; before her, she saw the masses of Lombardini's men huddling like sheep in the barrancas or scrambling up the hillside as if to escape a rising flood.

Then, just when it seemed most certain that the Mexican column would be killed or captured to the last man, the American bugles blew the "Halt!" and the "Cease Fire!"

Back to the southward scuttled Lombardini's battered host, thanking the saints for this most opportune miracle. It had been wrought, however, by a most unsaintly mortal—General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, President of Mexico. He had sent two officers with a white flag, the sight of which had instantly stopped the American fire. When brought before General Taylor, the two Mexican officers inquired politely what he desired; coolly pretending that they had come in response to a flag of truce sent by him. By the time the two had been sent back to their own lines again, Lombardini's column had been extricated, and an example set by which Mexico's presidents have profited time and again.

Safely out of cannon-shot in his padded and gilded coach, with eighteen lesser generals, a huge and glittering staff, and his personal body-guard of hussars in attendance, Santa Anna sat and scowled at the wreckage of Lombardini's column as it staggered past. Then over his sallow features broke a thin-lipped smile as Malena rode out of the throng and up to the door of the coach.

"You have the jewels?" he whispered eagerly.

"Yes, Excellency," she replied simply. "I place them in your hands—for Mexico."

Swiftly and symbolically Santa Anna placed them in his pocket.

"Mexico thanks you—I thank you, my child," he declared grandiloquently. "You have served us well."

"Excellency, I have seen the Americans' plans," Malena continued eagerly. "I know where every man and gun is posted."

Santa Anna checked her with a soft, uplifted palm.

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"I know everything," he declared omnisciently, adding with a gloomy scowl: "but I am badly served. That cowardly Miñon! That imbecile Lombardini! Like Xerxes, I can say, 'Today my men have fought like women and my women like men.' Do you see that sharp angle of the American line?"

"Yes, Excellency."

"There is the point for me to break it, now, with my reserves. But where is the one whom I can trust to lead them, without turning aside or faltering, through there to victory?"

"Let me lead them!" cried Malena. "Quick, sign the order and let me go—for Mexico!"

Glibly protesting, Santa Anna signed and watched her ride off with satisfaction in his heart. If she won the battle for him, the glory was his; if she was shot, the jewels were his, without any to question his title.

She expected much opposition on the part of the brigadiers and colonels of the reserves, to their being put under the command of a mere captain. But Santa Anna's orders were explicit and Malena's personality did the rest. She was now the generalissima of four thousand bayonets and eight hundred lances, a force greater than Taylor's entire army. And she first exhorted her men in words that put fire into their hearts, and then handled them in a way that would have put gray hairs into Old Rough-and-Ready's head—if it had not already been snow-white.

"Remember," she cried, "do not stop to fire, for your muskets are old and worthless! But do not fear to charge, for your bayonets are many and theirs are few! Forward, in the name of justice and liberty! *Viva la republica! Viva Mejico!*"

Not in clumsy columns, but in line, rank following rank at carefully timed intervals, Malena hurled her fresh and unwearied troops at the sorely battered angle formed by the Second Illinois and the Louisville Legion. When all her forces were in motion, she rode forward from the rear through the center of each rank in succession, till she was riding before them all, waving them on in the brave old-fashioned way.

"That is a gallant fellow," said Culver to himself as he conned his guns. "And his men are coming on well—too well."

Solid shot were doing little harm to the long, thin lines; there were no shell left, and the Mexicans were not yet within grape-shot range. They had to be checked before their momentum became too great; Culver thought of a way to do it. Riding up to Number Three gun, he dismounted and laid the piece with his own hands.

"War is a vile thing," he muttered, twirling the elevation screw. "I feel like a murderer; but if I can kill that officer, the charge will break."

Getting the elevation, he looked through the sights—and recognized Malena.

"Are you hit, sir?" cried the nearest gunner, seeing his captain turn pale and stagger against the wheel.

Culver did not hear him—he did not even hear the volley fired by the Louisville Legion on the battery's left. Sorely smitten, the right of Malena's line began to waver in its advance, and she galloped over to that flank to rally and urge it on. Hardly had she quit the center when a storm of grape-shot was poured into it from Culver's Battery.

Two salvos from the guns, two rolling volleys from the Second Illinois and the Louisville Legion, and then the charge struck home, crushing in both faces of the wedge at once. Outweighed, outnumbered, both their colonels killed—Clay, commander of the Kentuckians and only son of the great statesman, had five bayonets met in his living body—the two regiments were torn to pieces and the fragments driven to the rear.

Malena's men had broken the American line and were now in a position to roll it up to right and left, save for one obstacle still stubbornly blocking their victorious path—Culver's Battery. Instead of limbering up and withdrawing while yet there was time, Culver deliberately chose to sacrifice himself, his men and his guns, hoping that in the minutes so gained the rest of the army would be able to change front and save the day. It was the critical moment of the critical battle of the entire war.

Again and again the masses of Mexicans rushed cheering up to the very muzzles of the brazen guns, again and again the grape-shot tore through them, heaping the ground with horrors. Retiring the length of their recoil, the guns were loaded without sponging, fired without aim. Barely enough artillerymen were left alive to make three skeleton gun-crews. Both officers had

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stripped off their uniform frock-coats and were ramming home charges with their own hands, for wounded drivers to prime and fire. So they fired the last round.

"To the rear!" croaked Culver.

Carrying the guidon and the wounded and unconscious O'Brien between them, Trumpeter Schwartz and three others made good their retreat, thinking their captain was following close behind them. Too late, they turned and saw him with his back to a gun-wheel, ringed about with bayonets, fending them off with a clubbed sponge-staff, holding them all at bay. Then, as they watched, they saw a big Mexican leap up on the gun and bring the butt of his musket down from behind on the captain's head, and all was over.

CHAPTER XI

THE DISSOLUTION OF AN ARMY

Speed, speed, artillery, to the front, where the hurricane of fire
Crushes those noble regiments, reluctant to retire!
Speed swiftly! Gallop! Ah, they come! Again Bragg climbs the ridge
And his grape sweeps down the swarming foe as a strong man moweth sedge.
—*Pike's "Battle of Buena Vista."*

"A LITTLE more grape, Captain Bragg," said General Taylor coolly.

Thanks to the last stand of Culver's Battery, the other guns had had time to come up, with the Third Indiana and the Mississippi Rifles in zealous support. Malena had no available artillery; the limbers of the three pieces just captured had been emptied of the last charge. The ponderous Mexican guns could not be advanced over barrancas and ridges, but were regarded as fixtures once they had been tugged and trundled to the field of battle.

Having stormed and taken one American battery, Malena's men were extremely surprised and disgusted to have another one come dashing up and pour grape-shot into them when they least expected it. What was the use of charging those devilish cannon that flew over the ground faster than a man could run? What chance had a worn-out flintlock against the terrible rifles of the *Mississippianos?*

Unwilling to advance, and unable to stand their ground, the Mexican infantry began to fall back. Malena and certain officers did their best to rally them; but the once trimly-aligned regiments and companies had been shaken into a shapeless mob of demoralized men who had had enough.

They would have abandoned the captured six-pounders, had not Malena ridden up to where the three guns stood with their muzzles still pointing defiantly to the south. The ground about them was blue, wherever it was not red, with the dead artillerymen. There were no American wounded; but many of the corpses had had their throats cut from ear to ear. As it was at the Alamo—as it was but yesterday at Carrizal—so it was also at Buena Vista.

Under Malena's direction, the three pieces were being limbered up by Mexican infantrymen, when the moving of Number Three gun displaced the body of an American soldier who had fallen with his back against the right wheel. Now his head was pitched limply forward, and fresh blood spurted from the gashed scalp, showing that he was not dead but merely unconscious.

The nearest Mexican noted this fact, drew his knife, and was bending over to cut the wounded man's throat, when the flat of a hard-swung saber struck him behind the left ear, knocking him senseless.

Leaping from the saddle, Malena clasped her unconscious lover in her arms. Swiftly she bound up the wound in his head; she could find no other injury and could feel his heart beating as strongly as ever. He was alive; that coward at the rancho had lied—Harry had not been killed and this had been his battery her men had charged and captured. He had not been killed, but he would be, as soon as she left him to attend to her duties in the field.

Her troops were staggering under the fire poured into them by the exultant Americans. Without her to shepherd them, their retreat would soon become a stampede. She must go. But she must find a way to safeguard Harry first.

Her feminine eye had automatically and subconsciously observed that Culver had lost his blue cap and frock-coat but was still wearing the ornate riding-boots with huge silver Mexican spurs taken from Colonel Pilar at Encarnacion. His trousers—light gray with a broad red stripe up the outer seam—were unlike those of any other American uniform than that of the Flying

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Artillery. His powder-blackened shirt told of a fight, but no more.

The only thing that showed which side he had fought on was the American eagle on the brass buckle of his sword-belt. Unclasping this and letting the ends fall to the ground, Malena rose and beckoned to the two nearest Mexican soldiers.

"Lift up the *Señor Coronel* and place him on the limber-chest, so," she commanded. "Now walk, one of you on either side, and see that he is not jolted off or disturbed till I come again—to reward you both if you have done well. Attend him with all care, for he is a very gallant officer."

"We shall guard the brave colonel against all harm, my captain," replied the elder of the two men.

Culver's black hair and sunburned skin, his boots, the absence of the belt-buckle and the presence of Malena, had made a perfectly good Mexican of him in their eyes. As long as he remained unconscious, Culver would be as safe as any one could be on a field of battle. With him lying limply across the chest of Number Three limber, and with Mexican infantrymen taking the place of the dead or stampeded draft-horses, the three guns lurched off to the southward, in the thick of the retreating mob. Whipping the hindmost into some sort of a rear-guard, Malena prevented a threatened charge by May's Dragoons, whose weary horses could barely trot, and brought her command safely out of range and back to the original position, by sunset. Then she turned over the command to the senior brigadier and rode off to report to Santa Anna.

But before she could reach him, she saw his great gilded coach and all the glittering cavalcade about it leave the hill where they had overlooked the battle and, hidden now from the eyes of the Americans by the gathering dusk, speed southward down the road to Aguas Nuevas. It did not need the flight of her commander-in-chief to tell her that the battle was lost and the Mexican army about to retreat; she had had first-hand information on that point already. But there was not, in the entire army, a single ambulance or even a litter for the hundreds of wounded men who lay groaning or shrieking on the rocky ground. Knowing this, Malena had intended to use her high favor with Santa Anna to obtain one of the traveling-coaches of his personal suite for the use of Culver, before his nationality should betray itself. Now she could not hope to catch up with Santa Anna, for his carriage-horses were fresh and her mount was very tired. And all the coaches had gone.

All but one: the most comfortable-looking of the lot, which had been delayed while the driver harnessed up a fresh pair of well-matched mules. As she watched the equipage approach, Malena's nature underwent a profound and instantaneous change. She was no longer Doña Maria Magdalena Miranda, or the demure Miss Fortescue, or the chivalrous Captain Hidalgo—she was a strong and terrible huntress, providing for her wounded mate, and here was her prey.

Confronted by a mounted officer who covered him with a horse-pistol and told him to stop and throw up his hands, the driver of the coach obeyed instantly and in every particular. The solitary passenger, a plump little baldheaded man in a most gorgeous uniform, looked indignantly out of the door and into the muzzle of Malena's other horse-pistol.

"The señor will consider himself under arrest," she declared sorrowfully but very firmly.

"But why?" gasped the little fat man. "But why?"

"For reasons best known to the señor—and to his Excellency, President Santa Anna," replied Malena significantly.

He knew, and she knew that he knew, of Santa Anna's pleasing custom of picking scapegoats from among his subordinates, immediately after every defeat. He also knew Captain Hidalgo to be a confidential and highly favored agent of the President's. Moreover, he knew his own country and the ways of its officials.

"If the *Señor Capitán* will do me the honor to dismount and enter my poor vehicle," he purred suggestively, "I can show him conclusive evidence that I am not the one whom he seeks."

Tossing a ten-dollar gold piece to the delighted driver, but still keeping his employer covered with her pistol, Malena dismounted, stepped to the door of the coach and beckoned the owner forth.

"I must ask the señor for his weapons," she said, then deftly stripped him of sword and pistols, throwing them on the front seat of the coach. "And now, if the señor will but step to the other side of the road

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where the light is stronger—*gracias.*"

The little fat man trotted obediently across the road. Malena, standing by the step, looked at him intently and nodded approval.

"It is true—I have no reason to detain the señor. May you go with God. Drive on, *cochero.*" And coolly stepping into the coach, she sat down and closed the door.

"Villain! Highwayman! Thief of the sandhills, give me back my coach!" shrieked the little fat man, rushing to the door and wrenching it open.

"Ha!" cried Malena, thrusting the cold muzzle of her pistol into his plump cheek and seizing him by the collar as if to drag him inside. "So you are the man I am to take to General Santa Anna!"

"No! No!" he gasped. "Let me go, señor, let me but go!"

Wrenching himself free, he ran toward Malena's horse, which tossed its head and trotted off, with the little fat man in puffing pursuit. And for aught that is known to the contrary, he is pursuing and puffing still.

"HE IS a great coward, that one," observed the coachman, biting his gold piece. "And, moreover, he never paid me. I am glad to leave his service for yours, *señor capitán.*"

"First show me that you can drive. And first of all tell me your name."

"Pedro, señor."

"Then, Pedro, drive to that battery yonder, and let me see how close you bring the coach-door to that limber with the wounded officer lying on it."

So close did Pedro bring the coach-door to the limber that Malena thought she could carry the still unconscious Culver from one to the other in her own arms. She was proud of her young strength, in an age when most girls had the physique and temperament of wax dolls, but she had never tried to lift a dead weight of one hundred and eighty-four pounds.

Providentially, just as she got him fairly in her arms, the two soldiers who had been guarding Culver sprang to her aid, and between them they got the wounded man safely and comfortably into the coach. Giving each of the two a year's pay, or almost as much as the republic owed him, Malena told Pedro to drive to Aguas Nuevas and sank wearily back on the cushions.

They were soft cushions, for the little fat man had been fond of his comfort and had provided for it most ingeniously. By means of a sliding shelf between the seats, and a sort of boot, shaped like the foot of a coffin and sticking out forward beside the driver's box, he had contrived a snug bunk.

There were swan's-down pillows, and rugs and blankets of the finest wool; a carpet-bag full of clean linen shirts, good for bandaging; a plentiful supply of Cuban tobacco, with tinder, flint and steel; a silver flask of 1810 brandy, two bottles of old port, and a wicker hamper crammed with the best white cabin biscuit, coffee, chocolate, a huge bunch of raisins and a big ham. The carriage itself was of the light, strong, London-made type then beginning to replace the ponderous old Spanish coaches, and its splendid springs made tolerably smooth riding even out of the rocky road to Aguas Nuevas.

But for the other wounded, packed in springless, splintery ox-carts, it was a road of torture. There were only thirty ox-carts for two thousand men too badly injured to totter a step further to the rear on their own legs. Hundreds were borne on clumsy stretchers made of muskets and blankets, heavy and awkward things for tired men to carry twenty miles. Many a stretcher was dropped and its occupant left to drag himself out of the path of the oncoming gun-wheels. Eight hundred wounded were left on the battle-field.

"These men," wrote a Mexican historian and eye-witness, "abandoned on a desert, drenched in their own blood, shivering with cold, parched with thirst, without medical stores, without shelter, without food, saw their companions disappear, bearing with them all life and hope. Then was depicted on the faces of those still conscious the appalling calmness of despair. Already they could see the coyotes waiting for the moment when they might begin their frightful banquet. Those who survived that night of horror appealed to the sympathy of the enemy, and it is due to justice to say that the Americans complied with the laws of war and the dictates of humanity."

By the lurid light of the still smoldering storehouses and piles of grain—Taylor's men had set fire to everything they had to leave behind them, forty-eight hours before—Santa Anna's weary thousands reentered Aguas Nuevas. They drank like cattle of the fouled waters of the wrecked reservoir,

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then dropped to the ground and slept where they lay.

AT DAWN the assembly was sounded, and the shattered brigades paraded in skeleton strength. Already the loss by straggling and desertion equaled that of yesterday's battle. Santa Anna delivered an impressive oration, calling them his "army of heroes," and congratulating himself and them on the great victory they had won. In proof of this, the four captured six-pounders were prominently displayed.

Then the victorious general, with his staff and escort, ran away to the south as fast as he could, leaving his army of heroes to take care of itself.

Leaderless—for none of its brigadiers would suffer the command of another—unprovisioned, except by its own camp-women crushed by defeat, the army limped and staggered from water-hole to brackish water-hole, across one hundred and eighty miles of desert. Men and women and little naked children, they died together by hundreds, of thirst by day, of cold by night, of hunger at all times. Their lips were so dried and shrunken, says one who marched with them that the teeth were exposed in a terrible, skull-like grin.

One night, after a day of burning heat, an icy Norther swooped down upon the wretched host. For lack of other fuel, they fired the grove of palms where they were encamped. The sun-dried trunks roared blazing to the sky for five scorching minutes, then sank to darkness, and the cold wind blew and blew.

Men deserted by whole companies at a time, in one case murdering the captain who tried to prevent them. Many of the soldiers had been bandits before the war; now they returned to their old trade, with new partners and fresh zeal. The whole country was overrun with gangs of armed plunderers.

Of the twenty thousand who had marched out of San Luis to Buena Vista, five thousand returned.

Following close in Santa Anna's wheel-tracks, Malena had escaped the worst hardships of the retreat. Her new servant, Pedro, proved a prince of foragers; never did he fail to find food for himself, his masters, and the mules. Throughout the two weeks' journey, Culver had lain in a stupor or tossed in a low fever, without speaking a single intelligible word or seeming to recognize the woman he loved.

"Yet the wound on his head is healing nicely," said Malena to the best doctor in San Luis Potosi, who was also an honest man.

"True, but the blow may well have injured the brain. It is a case for the learned English and German doctors in Mexico City, not for a poor Spanish physician of the provinces."

Again Malena journeyed southward in the wake of Santa Anna, who was speeding to the capital to suppress an insurrection of the Polkos faction against the rule of Vice-President Farias. Domestic civil war was raging even during a foreign invasion, according to the custom of Mexico since the days of Cortez.

Reports of the street-fighting reached Malena as she was leaving Guanajuato. That night, as her little party lay encamped in the woods, she fell asleep wondering whether to press on or stay where she was. And the matter was settled for her soon after she woke up.

TO BE CONCLUDED

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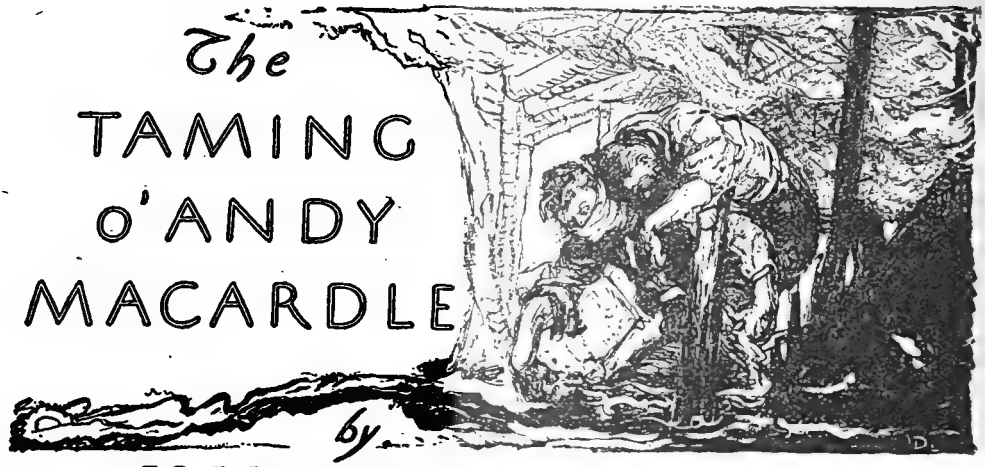
The TAMING o' ANDY MACARDLE



by FRED T. BARTON

IN EVERY camp and every town in the Southern Kansas coal-fields Andy MacArdle was feared and respected. He was a man of few words and a flaying fist. If he ever had friends he left them in Pennsylvania when he came West.

Jerry Moran found him standing beside the cage at shaft No. 6 sullenly watching the miners drop downward into the black pit. From the time the two men faced each other a barrier of antagonism was raised between them.

"Who's MacArdle?" asked Jerry.

The pit boss reached out and snatched the yellow slip from the young miner's hand. A frown spread over his bearded face as he read Jerry's name. He scowled keenly at the boy.

"Y' say y' name's Moran?" growled the Scotchman, half to himself, but looking straight into the eyes of the man before him.

"Yeah."

"Can y' cage?" asked MacArdle.

"Sure," came the quick reply.

MacArdle pulled him on the cage, waved a signal, and the two shot down. In a few minutes Jerry Moran was "caging" for MacArdle, pushing on the loaded cars, and swinging off the empties from the cage at the bottom of the shaft.

All the morning MacArdle, silent and scowling, watched the rolling muscles in Moran's bare back and arms knot and relax as the Irish lad swung to his work, almost lifting the cars on the cage with contemptuous strength that MacArdle could not help but admire.

Both men rode the first cage up at noon. Moran squatted with the other grimy miners and spread out his lunch in the shade of the tipple. MacArdle strode past him down the shale pile.

Over the far edge of the dump Jerry saw a girl appear. She ran to MacArdle, her black curls flying, and calico skirts whipping about her youthful body. She held out a lunch pail to the pit boss and laughed up into his face. The big Scotchman patted the little brown hand that rested on his arm. She then skipped back over the edge of the dump and waved as she disappeared. At the tipple MacArdle turned, and, with never a change of expression in eyes or face, watched the girl toil up the hill back of the shale pile toward the cottage where she kept house for her father.

There was not a man at No. 6 shaft, from the superintendent down to the smallest mule-boy, who would not have sat on a keg of giant powder and lighted the fuse if he thought his death would mean anything to Jean MacArdle. As much as men hated her father, they loved his daughter.

On days when weather permitted Jean MacArdle to bring her father's lunch, she never reached the shaft. The great, bearded pit boss never failed to meet her out on the dump. But just the same, more young miners came out of No. 6 during lunch hour than at any other shaft.

Jerry heard the ringing laugh as the girl

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ran back over the dump, her curls bobbing. He was still watching as she waved to her father from the side of the hill, and he paid not the least attention to MacArdle who stood beside him.

The pit boss saw the boy watching the blue calico-clad wisp of a girl. The big Scot's brows gathered. He stepped toward Jerry, his sandy beard twitching. Jerry turned with a smile, let his lithe body down on his haunches, and continued his meal. MacArdle, scowling, moved away.

All afternoon the pit boss railed at the men who came within earshot of his booming voice. Greeks and Italians cowered as he lashed them with curses. It was almost quitting time when MacArdle took out the little slip of paper he had snatched from Jerry that morning.

"Moran," he said harshly, "where y' from?"

"Been over in Missouri shoveling zinc jack," answered Jerry.

"Raised there?"

"Nope," shoving off the empties, "Pennsylvania." The loaded cars rolled on the cage. "Stillwell," finished Jerry.

Even as the disjointed words came, one at a time, a stealthy, cunning, hateful light began to smolder in MacArdle's eyes. His big, dirty hand crushed the slip of paper. He was silent while Jerry loaded another cage. His next question came carelessly.

"Was Tom Moran your father?"

Jerry started, glanced quickly at MacArdle, and almost let a car roll into the sump.

"He was—if it's the Tom Moran your're speaking about," the boy answered. "He left my mother when I was a kid. Know him?"

A great lump seemed to roll slowly down MacArdle's hairy throat.

"—— no!" came harshly from the pit boss as he turned and started into the mine. "Used to live in Stillwell and heard o' Tom Moran."

Jerry, perplexed, watched the glare of MacArdle's safety-lamp disappear. Reference to his father had awakened memories of a little overworked woman he had called mother years ago. She had never talked much about Tom Moran, but always cried a great deal whenever his father's name was mentioned.

Jerry wondered as the cage whirled upward that night if the girl with the shy face and ringing laugh would meet MacArdle "on top." He looked for the pit boss but did not see him. Neither was the girl about when he looked across the dump. Jerry trailed toward the camp to find quarters.

MOTHER DUGAN was glad to have a new boarder for, ever since Pat Dugan's open light had bobbed into an entry filled with gas, she had found the dollars scarce and living high. Jerry sat at the long table with other miners, and for some time the hungry men were too busy to talk. Mother Dugan flitted about the table divining their wishes and saving them the trouble of asking.

"Ol' man pretty rantin' today, huh?" spoke up Stillings, No. 6 pumper, directing his words mostly to his plate as he wound a swab of cabbage around his fork.

"Yeah, he'll gather a load at Duffy's 'blind pig' tonight and raise hell tomorrow," mumbled Puffer, one of the mule-boys.

"Who was the girl I saw on the dump at noon?" carelessly asked Jerry, breaking into the conversation for the first time.

The men looked up and a red glow spread over Jerry's face. Their simultaneous gaze startled, then nettled the young Irishman, and a challenging light flashed into his eyes.

"Mac's daughter, Jean," soberly answered old Matt Wells, whose steady hand pulled the levers that shot the cages up and down at No. 6.

Stillings pushed back from the table. The others followed. By ones and twos they wandered outside. All but Wells and Jerry left for the same destination—Duffy's. Moran slid upon the porch rail and Wells squatted on the step. The old man silently filled his pipe and kept the bowl glowing with thoughtful puffs.

"You're new hereabouts?"

"Just in from the Joplin district," Jerry answered.

Wells studied the chewed stem of his pipe.

"How'd Mac treat you this afternoon?"

"Oh, MacArdle! All right I guess," grinned Jerry. "Somewhat wild with the bohunks, and kicked a mule or two down the track. Is he always that way?"

"Well, not altogether. He kinda takes streaks." The old man reflected, puffed a halo of reeking smoke about his head, then carelessly, "You saw Jean MacArdle this noon?"

Jerry glanced keenly at the engineer,

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saw only the back of his head through the smoke, and, for want of something better, drawled—

"Yeah."

"You know, he's pretty touchy about that lass o' his," muttered Wells thoughtfully. "But I guess a feller's got to watch a gal like that round diggin's like these."

Jerry was silent.

"He never lets none o' the lads light around his place," Wells continued. "Runs 'em off. They say as how she's the best drawin' card the church here ever had. All the lads tog up on Sunday just to sit in the rear pew and watch her walk down the aisle."

Jerry puffed at his own pipe.

"Goin' down town," finally announced the old man.

Jerry didn't offer to go along and Wells loafed Duffyward.

The next day was Saturday and a half-day shift. From the time the first of the cars began arriving at the cage below, MacArdle found fault with the new cager. But, as the morning wore along, he directed his oaths at the ways the cars were being handled. Jerry defiantly ignored the pit boss's abuse. He worked steadily away, shooting cars on and off the cage with crashing regularity. Several times the angry color flooded the young Irishman's face.

"What the devil y' tryin' to do, break the locks?" roared MacArdle, as Jerry heaved a load on the cage.

Jerry turned deliberately and faced the pit boss. A sneer, cold and challenging, distorted the Scotchman's face. Just then the short, soft moan of the mine whistle from on top echoed down the shaft.

"S'long," gritted Jerry as he turned, rolled two cars on the cage for the last load and squatted between.

As he shot upward a triumphant laugh rang in his ears.

SUNDAY morning Jerry began at eight o'clock the most tedious job he had ever faced. From upstairs Mother Dugan heard nervous, uneven steps, and mentally considered how long the frayed carpet in that one spot before the broken three-cornered mirror would last if the new boarder dressed up every Sunday. At ten-thirty o'clock Jerry, with only two court-plasters covering razor cuts on his face, clattered down the creaking stairs.

"Gosh a'mighty!" huskily whispered Stillings, as he watched Jerry from the porch. "He's a-goin' to church."

The bare-walled little church seemed to creak as Jerry edged his big frame into a pew midway down the aisle. He purposely passed up the rear pews, which were already well filled.

The buzz of masculine conversation from the rear seats stopped. For the first time Jerry realized how big and conspicuous he was. He had a panicky, lost feeling.

Then past him down the aisle, almost touching his big red hand, which lopped over the edge of the seat, swished a flurry of skirts. Somehow Jerry knew it was Jean MacArdle, although he did not raise his eyes. He withdrew the hand from the aisle, tried to find a place for it, and scraped a song-book off the seat.

It landed on the floor with, to Jerry's ears, the report of a "horse back" blast. His broad shoulders became wedged between his pew and the one in front when he reached for the book. By the time he extricated himself and straightened up, face red from exertion, the congregation was standing for the first hymn.

When Jerry towered to his feet he found advantage in height. He looked over heads in front and easily picked out her curly hair and slender, brown neck. During the sermon he learned the seat in front was too close to give his knees comfortable room. He heard with relief the monotonous tones of the minister cease and a hymn announced. He hadn't heard a word of the sermon.

Jerry tried to distinguish her voice but an angular young woman in the choir seemed to be monopolizing the singing. He listened to the benediction, and was thinking of black curls and a shapely neck when the congregation began to pass out.

At the door the Reverend Mr. Mock was shaking hands with members of his flock. Jerry tried to edge by him.

"Ah!" said the Reverend Mr. Mock. "A new face." He had Jerry's big hand pumping it up and down in short, quick jerks. "Have I met you?" smiling into Jerry's flushed, embarrassed face.

"Nope," stammered Jerry, confused. "Moran's my name."

"A fine Irish name, that," said the Reverend Mr. Mock. "Let us see you often—ah, Miss Jean."

Jerry tried to squeeze through the

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door, but the Reverend Mr. Mock's hand barred the way as it reached up and clamped upon the boy's shoulder.

"Miss MacArdle, this is Mr. Moran—with us for the first time today," beamed the important Reverend Mr. Mock. "Miss MacArdle is one of my most faithful members," he continued heartily to Jerry.

"I'm glad to know you." Jean MacArdle's low voice, a little confused, startled Jerry out of the idea of running.

"Glad to meet you," he floundered, as he looked down into a pair of shy, somewhat frightened, brown eyes, which dropped instantly beneath his gaze as Jean lowered her long lashes.

The Reverend Mr. Mock, solicitous for the rest of his flock, pushed Jerry and the girl out of the door. Jerry found himself looking down upon Jean MacArdle's curls as he walked beside her out of the churchyard.

"I'm caging at No. 6," bluntly rumbled Jerry.

"Oh, dad's pit boss there," smiled the girl, lifting her eyes and dropping them quickly. "How long have you been at No. 6?"

"Only two days," answered Jerry, gaining courage and hoping she would ask another question. But she didn't and the silence grew embarrassing.

Finally in desperation he stammered—

"Going home?"

"Yes, I live right over there," murmured Jean, pointing.

"I'll walk with you," and Jerry wondered at his own bravery.

He didn't see the startled look that came into Jean MacArdle's eyes.

"Oh, I can—" she was stammering.

"That's all right." Jerry was treading air. "I can just as well as not. It ain't far."

At the outer rim of shale Jerry helped the girl over the tiny stream of water that ran around the dump from the engine-house. As his hand touched the soft cloth of her dress his heart bounded rapturously.

"I saw you bring your father's lunch the other day," he said.

"Oh, did you?" absently.

Jean MacArdle was not at all displeased, but she was having troubled thoughts as Jerry walked up the hill beside her. The little cottage was near.

"Good-by," whispered the girl so low that Jerry did not note the touch of fright in her voice.

Hurriedly she stepped upon the porch.

"I'll be at church next Sunday," ventured Jerry. "Will you be there?"

"By the Almighty, no, she'll not be there!" roared a voice from the door, and Andy MacArdle stepped out on the porch, wrath and hate blazing from his eyes.

The girl caught her breath in a little frightened sob and stared at her father. Jerry's face flushed with angered pride.

"Inside, Jean girl," ordered MacArdle. "As for you," advancing on Jerry, "I'll not have my gal runnin' with a son o' Tom Moran."

"Dad!" screamed the girl, catching MacArdle's arm.

The Scotchman stopped. His fist slowly dropped to his side.

"Please go," pleaded Jean, turning to Jerry.

The young miner stood with set jaws, ready to meet MacArdle.

"What does he mean?" gritted Jerry.

"Please," tearfully from the girl.

Jerry's hunched shoulders straightened. This time his eyes challenged MacArdle. He turned and strode down the path, never once looking back.

His thoughts were all a jumble. What had MacArdle meant? What did the Scotchman find wrong with a son of Tom Moran? Jerry recalled his conversation with MacArdle that first day in the mine.

He went to his room to think. It was after dark before he finally eliminated Jean MacArdle from his thoughts long enough to decide that his days of caging at No. 6 were over. Before he left the camp he meant to learn why a son of Tom Moran couldn't "run" with Andy MacArdle's daughter.

The next morning Jerry went to the shaft after the men were all below, drew his wages, and returned to Mother Dugan's. From the porch he heard the mine whistle at noon. He watched a blue figure run down the hill and climb the shale dump. He didn't go inside until he saw her return.

DUFFY'S "blind pig" was crowded that night. The two wall lamps, one at either end of the short, rough bar, shed a yellow, murky glow about the room. The place reeked of stale beer and cheap whisky. At the bar stood Andy MacArdle.

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The door opened and Jerry Moran squeezed in. The crowd parted as he edged his way through.

"MacArdle!" Jerry's hand was on the Scotchman's shoulder. He spoke so low that only the pit boss heard. "I'd like a few words with you—outside."

MacArdle wheeled heavily, his glass raised. His eyes narrowed to a sneering, contemptuous gleam.

"Have yer words right here," he snarled.

Jerry forgot the crowd. In his anger he saw only the scornful, jeering face of the Scotchman.

"I want to know, MacArdle," his voice husky, "what it is you've against Tom Moran's son?"

The clatter and hum of voices stopped. The two men glared at each other.

"Just this," bellowed MacArdle. "Tom Moran was a sneak and a cur and so's his——"

He never finished. Jerry's hard fist landed fairly between MacArdle's eyes. The pit boss staggered. He caught at the bar, blinded for an instant. Roaring an oath he launched his big frame at Jerry. The bar splintered from its floor fastenings as the two men met. The room cleared as the crowd jammed in a frightened herd through the doors.

Clinched, arms locked like great steel tentacles about each other, the two men fell crashing to the floor. Rage-blind they fought. They floundered into the loosened bar. It pitched back into the glassware. Flying splinters of crystal littered the room and showered the straining, panting men on the floor.

They came to their feet, tearing at each other. They broke apart. Jerry sent MacArdle crashing into a corner. The big Scotchman staggered up from a litter of tables and chairs. Jerry, blood smeared over his face from a cut, met MacArdle's rush with flaying blows. The pit boss came blindly on and again they reeled into each other's crushing grip.

Neither one saw the man in dirty, white apron, piggish eyes gleaming, slide into the room and scramble over the wrecked bar. Furiously they fought. Both were almost bare from the waist up. Tattered shreds of clothing hung to their shoulders. Breath came to them in panting, wheezing grunts. Bare arms slipped on sweaty, bare backs as they clutched for holds.

Circling, struggling, they fought in the center of the littered room. MacArdle rushed. Jerry bent to meet him. From behind the overturned bar sprang Duffy. He swung a whisky bottle at Jerry's head. MacArdle's blind rush sent the three men sprawling.

Jerry came to consciousness at Mother Dugan's. His head hurt. He opened his eyes.

"Where is he?" he asked the man beside the bed.

"Who, Duffy?" asked Stillings. "MacArdle attended to him. The dirty whisky-pedler cracked you on the head with a bottle. Mac would have killed him if we hadn't pulled him off. Guess you ain't hurt much. Feel better?"

"I'm all right," said Jerry swinging off the bed to his feet. "My head hurts, that's all."

"You'd better turn in," said Stillings. He turned at the door. "You made some fight, lad, but you'd better clear the camp tomorrow. MacArdle says he'll kill you."

He closed the door gently and left Jerry alone with his thoughts.

SHORTLY after the mine whistle summoned the miners to work the next morning, Jerry left Mother Dugan's. He carried a battered suit-case that contained mostly his work-clothes. Over at the mine he saw the white exhaust steam shoot up from the engine-house as the cages slid up and down the shaft. Then a long blast of the whistle shot a larger spray of steam into the air. Another blast followed. The third wailed off into a moaning call.

Jerry stopped and gazed at the mine. Even as he stood, the three long blasts were being repeated. It meant a fire. Jerry saw it—a small flame leaping up at the corner of the engine-house. He ran toward the shaft. As he neared the mine Jerry saw that the fire was spreading. The whistle had stopped and he guessed that old man Wells had been driven from his post.

By the time he panted up the shale dump the smoke was pouring into the sky. He could hear the crackling of the flames, and sparks showered about him. Men were running, shouting and yelling orders. Jerry saw old Wells, face blackened and hands scorched, watching the leaping flames and cursing to himself.

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"Pumps are stopped. Looks like everything's gone," the old man shouted in Jerry's ear.

"Everybody out?" yelled Jerry, for he knew what it meant when the pumps didn't work.

"Brought up the last load before I left," said Wells, holding his blackened hands out in front of him.

A man came running from under the tipple.

"God, men," he screamed, "MacArdle's down below, and the casing's on fire."

"How do you know?" yelled Wells as the crowd surged toward the shaft.

"Heard him call," was the shouted answer.

A bucket brigade was trying to save the tipple, and was dousing water into the shaft over the shouldering casing timbers that had caught fire from falling sparks.

"He's gone," yelled a miner leaning over the shaft in the smoke.

The air-pumps as well as the water-pumps were dead, and steam and smoke were being sucked down the main shaft.

Into the crowd pushed Jean MacArdle, eyes dilated with fright.

"Father—where is he?" she cried to Jerry.

"I'll get him," said the young Irishman, handing the girl over to Stillings. "Take her away."

"The air-shaft is the only chance," called Jerry. "Get the rope."

Willing hands hastily spliced ropes to reach the lower level. Jerry worked fast, binding a wet towel over his face and giving instructions to the men. Out of the air-shaft poured clouds of smoke and steam, sucked through the mine from down the main shaft. Into this Jerry swung out and disappeared as the men above lowered him.

"Watch out for water, it's filling the sump," screamed Wells.

Jerry heard. He knew the water would soon overflow the mine. A strut scraped his arm, tearing away the skin. He felt the warm blood trickle. His downward rush slackened with a jerk. The men above, by the rope they had played out, knew that Jerry was nearing the bottom. The miner's eyes were shut in the smoke. His lungs heaved with the foul air he sucked through the towel.

His feet touched water. He threw his body to one side and fell sprawling on the floor of the mine. He slipped out of the noose and jerked the rope twice—the signal that he was going in.

Groping, stumbling, he made his way down the entry into the teeth of driving smoke, into the main shaft. He knew MacArdle, to escape the foul air, must have retreated into a side entry. His head whirled and the pounding blood seemed to be bursting from his temples. He reeled into a room. There the smoke was not so dense. He drew deep breaths and staggered out into the entry.

His hand feeling along the side of the rough, jagged "gob" wall, slipped off into space and he fell into a side entry. As he stumbled up it a few feet he found breathing easier. Slipping the towel from his mouth he shouted for MacArdle. He listened and called again, but no answer came.

Out into the main entry, out into the smoke, he fought his way. He was nearing the main shaft and the suffocating clouds were more dense. He slid into another room, and, as he did, he heard a call. Jerry opened his smarting eyes and saw a miner's light ahead of him. He made his way toward it and caught MacArdle's hand.

"Come—hurry," he mumbled through the towel.

He drew another towel out of his shirt-front and held it toward the pit boss. MacArdle tottered forward and peered close through the murk into Jerry's face. The Scotchman's eyes gleamed brightly. A ringing, uncanny, guttural laugh burst from his parched throat.

"You here!" he screamed, and his laugh echoed through the mine. "Y're a dead one, too."

The pit boss snatched the towel from Jerry and flung it back into the darkness.

"Man, you're crazy!" shouted Jerry, catching MacArdle and pulling him toward the entry.

"No! No! No!" MacArdle swung his fist wildly at Jerry and grappled.

Jerry fought to keep from being borne down under the maniacal strength of the Scotchman.

"You'll die, too," panted MacArdle.

Jerry's body seemed to be crushing as the long arms of MacArdle wound about him. He was battling for both their lives against the wily cunning and almost superhuman strength of a madman. In the low black room the two men struggled, their

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straining bodies making little eddies in the curling smoke.

So close were they locked in each other's grip that Jerry's face was scorched by MacArdle's safety lamp. Slowly, steadily, the insane pit boss was crushing down the young miner. Desperately Jerry struggled, his lungs almost cracking as the smoke poured into the room.

A violent fit of coughing shook the pit boss. With all the might he could gather, Jerry made a last effort. For a moment the hold of his adversary was broken. Jerry stooped, straightened, and sent his antagonist hurtling head foremost against the wall. The big frame of the pit boss crumpled and lay still.

Trembling, exhausted, Jerry clutched at the sides of the room for support. His fumbling fingers adjusted the towel that had slipped around his neck. He tottered to the side of the pit boss and dragged him out into the entry.

He tried to swing the unconscious man to his shoulder, but his strength was almost gone. Over the ties of the little track he pulled MacArdle. He stumbled and fell. He started crawling on, his mind numb. Vaguely he remembered MacArdle and crawled back after him. On—on—on. God, would he ever make it?

A cooling sensation livened his deadened body. He realized he was splashing in the water at the foot of the air-shaft. He groped for the rope. His fingers found it, but it seemed as if his arms were lifeless. The knot would not slip. He worked the rope under MacArdle's shoulders and crawled into the same noose.

Jerry never remembered pulling the rope for the signal to be raised. When the miners above lifted the two men into fresh air they thought both were dead. There was a frantic girl on top who fought to reach the two big bodies as they were carried out onto the dump. They started to carry MacArdle to his home.

"Bring him, too!" cried Jean MacArdle, pointing to Jerry.

IT WAS three days after the fire at No. 6 shaft before Jerry Moran was able to be up and about, and take care of himself without the help of his little nurse. Jean MacArdle could hardly be made to leave either her father or Jerry during those three days, not even when Mother Dugan relieved her during a part of the day.

On this afternoon Jerry sat in a big chair on the MacArdle porch. At his feet sat Jean. Jerry was studying the profile of the girl's tanned face. She looked up, her inquiring eyes laughing.

"Are you thinking, and what about?" she chided him.

Jerry's eyes answered. Jean would run but he reached out, captured a brown hand, and held it tightly. Jean pulled away at arm's length and stood defiant.

"Jean," said Jerry slowly, "your father says a son of Tom Moran can't run with his girl. Maybe you——"

"Miss Jean," called Mother Dugan from the door, "your father's asking for you."

Jean, her face flushed and eyes sparkling, went to her father.

Since the accident at the mine, MacArdle had been improving slowly. Jerry, partly because of doctor's orders, had not been in to see the pit boss. When Jean left him he sat on the steps and waited, anxious and troubled, yet with a gladness surging through him that soon banished all disagreeable thoughts of the girl's father.

"Jerry," said a soft voice at the door, "father wants to see you."

Jerry sprang up.

"I've told him about—about the mine fire," whispered Jean, and, as she led him into the sick-room, she surrendered a hand into one of Jerry's.

In the bed lay Andy MacArdle. One big hand was fumbling with the coverlet. He glanced up at the girl and man who stood beside him. His deep, blood-streaked eyes studied Jerry's face.

"Boy," the words rolled out slowly, "Tom Moran might o' been your father, but y're your mother's son. She was a good woman, and worked hard for you after your dad—Tom Moran—took away," again, as on that day in the mine, a great lump seemed to roll down MacArdle's throat, clogging his words, "away my wife—and—and left me alone with this little gal," he finished with an effort.

One hand groped for Jean's, found it, and clung to it. Jean, holding to the hands of the two men, seemed to link a chasm.

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EXTRA HAZARDOUS

by G. A. WELLS

IN THE beginning, the A-5 was designed to accomplish what any other machine made by the hand of man will accomplish; but after all she was but a machine, and, owing to a defect, she did what any other machine would have done under like circumstances—she sank.

From the first, she was known throughout the length and breadth of the service as a "hoodoo," and when she ran up against a coral bank and smashed her nose she but added to her reputation. Her port forward tanks gave way softly and gently, emitting a sound very much like the soft cooing of a babe as it falls into gentle and undisturbed slumber. Then having frustrated the aim of her builders, much to their discredit, she slowly settled down to the bottom of the sea where she lay slanting at a slight angle against the very rock which had sent her down. This happened just beyond the lip of the breakwater, a rather unhandy location if you know the place.

For a time Hart, the lieutenant in charge, stood immobile, his senses stricken dumb and useless; then, his face blanched and haggard like the face of a man in dire need of sleep, he descended from the steering platform and walked, or rather clambered, forward, the men flattening themselves against either bulkhead as he passed.

He examined the plates of the tanks long and critically, then shook his head. No words were necessary; each man of that small crew understood by a single quick glance at the face of their commanding officer what a dozen or a thousand spoken words would have failed to convey—that the mishap was serious. Hart backed to the gratings over the port accumulator tanks and sat down heavily, locking his hands about his knees.

"Well!" he said finally when no man essayed to break the silence. "We're down—down deep. If any of you care to try——"

Abruptly he ceased speaking and waved his hand toward the gaunt tube, boring its way through the twisted nose of the submarine. Burley, the chief machinist's mate edged toward the shattered tanks and looked them over with appraising eye, the while rummaging about in his practical brain for the proper tools to right a grievous wrong. For fully fifteen minutes, and silent minutes they were, he stood by the tanks appraising and rummaging, but at last was forced to admit to himself that even his brain contained no such tools as the emergency required.

"It's a case for the yard, sir," he said shortly, turning to Hart.

Hart nodded absently.

"So I thought."

The lieutenant looked about him at the strained faces of the men lined against the background of the dun-colored bulkheads.

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He noted that, while the faces were pinched, there was no trace of fear in them. The expression in each face was no more than acute curiosity, or possibly the result of strained nerves. He smiled contentedly to himself.

"We'd all get crumpled if we tried the tube, that's certain," said Burley, glancing over Hart's shoulder at the dial on the face of the conning-tower bulkhead. He whistled softly to himself. "We're fifty fathoms down, and that of course is impossible."

"Yes, so I thought," repeated Hart mechanically for want of something better to say. He leaned back and focused his eyes on a bolt-head across the passageway.

"Suppose you try the tube, Kelly," said Burley presently when his nerves were beginning to crash and grind.

Kelly, electrician, first-class, shook his red head decisively.

"Ye're after killin' me, ain't ye, Burley?" he accused reproachfully, and then laughed.

Kelly's laugh broke the spell. As the men fell away from the bulkheads they all laughed. It was not a care-free laugh by any means, but the sort of laugh men are given to when their nerves are relieved of a great strain. They began to talk, to talk of nothing in particular and yet everything under the sun. It was the speech of hysteria. They one and all turned their thoughts away from what actually was to what they would wish it to be.

"An' Wooly said as how he'd have hot biscuits for us against our comin' back," said Johnny Metz when the clamor had subsided somewhat to permit of reasonable understanding; Johnny was diminutive and therefore called "Babe" by his mates.

"An' I like biscuits awful—them what Wooly makes," joined in Price of the port motors.

"Wooly sure does make 'em; he's a bigger man than the first luff," said Pardee.

Pardee, in the surface navy, had been coxswain of the admiral's very own barge, but had abandoned certainties for extra-hazardous undertakings under the sea.

"Ye'll not be after gettin' any of Wooly's biscuits this day, Pardee, I'm thinkin'," taunted Kelly. "Ye'll be a long time gettin' back to the bunk on the dock this trip, me friend."

"Shut up, Irishman! You're a —— pessimist," rasped Burley, who possessed a certain amount of authority over his mates by virtue of several service stripes and a regulation cap and coat instead of the watch-cap and blouse. "Don't you believe him, Babe."

"I ain't," lied Babe, who knew what they all knew but denied.

And through all the pandemonium of aimless talk Hart sat a committee of one devising, or attempting to devise, methods of deliverance from a submarine with a smashed nose lying fifty fathoms under surface. At that great depth it was sheer madness to attempt to go out through the tube, even if the tube were in condition for that; a man would be crushed like an egg-shell long before he reached the surface. As Burley had said, it was purely a case for dry-dock; submarines, in the very nature of their calling, are not so desig ed as to permit their carrying excess luggage and burdening themselves like ordinary cargo boats.

BY NOON—they had gone down by nine—water began to creep in aft. Hart sent two men there with mauls and caulking-irons and gaskets and other necessary things in an endeavor to stop the leaks as they found them. But it was a futile job from the first. Leaks breed leaks, and other leaks began to appear at various points along the hull, working themselves along from stern to nose like sparks along a powder train, and almost as quickly.

Then the water reached the accumulator tanks and the air went bad. They all strained for breath like so many winded horses.

"I'd give a month's pay for just one good breath of air!" declared Pardee about two that afternoon, and the entire crew nodded its willingness to make a like sacrifice for a like boon.

"I'd give a year's pay!" gasped Pardee at three, and threw down his maul and climbed wearily to the steering platform to keep out of the water.

"Them biscuits is all cold by this time!" wailed Price, accompanying the wail with heroic smashes of his maul. "Oh, God! Just one decent breath to my lungs!"

"It's always your gut!" growled Pardee. "Let that go for a while and concern yourself with the ultimate destination of your soul, man!"

Babe turned and giggled; the suggestion

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was a good one. He beat a measure of silence with his maul and cried aloud—

"Who in this forsaken ship's company has a Bible about?"

"Listen at 'im!" roared Kelly mockingly. "Ye'd think he was a churchman to hear 'im talk. The idea! Him a churchman! But who has got a Bible, or even a prayer-book for the sake of his soul?"

Some one rummaged about in a ditty-box and a Bible was produced, one of the sort given gratis to wayward sailors by a society of well-intentioned persons who concern themselves with sailors' souls. Babe took it gratefully and clambered laboriously up beside Pardee. He opened the book and read at random:

"'But if the Lord make a new thing—' which is submarines, I take it—'and the earth open her mouth and swallow them up—'"

"The earth,——! It's water, ain't it, Babe?" broke in Price.

"Ye sacrilegious fool, it's the word of the Book. Don't stick in that way!" howled Kelly, crossing himself.

"It says 'earth' here, Price," said Babe with some heat. "Keep still. 'And the earth open her mouth and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit——'"

"Into the pit! God!" sobbed Price.

"'Then shall ye understand that these men have provoked the Lord.' Ain't that the truest thing ever wrote?" inquired Babe thickly, and looked down challengingly upon the faces below him.

"It's as if it was written for such as you, Kelly," averred Price.

"I'm not wicked," defended Kelly sharply. "I'll have ye know I'm regular at confession—ask Father Henney for that. An' I goes to church regular when I'm able, an'——"

"And gets drunk on occasion when you're able," supplemented Pardee scathingly. "Does a Christian get drunk, Mister Kelly?"

"An' don't I send fifteen of my pay to the mother every month?" finished Kelly, ignoring the interruption.

"Which ain't at all bad for you," observed Babe.

"I'll not be gettin' drunk no more."

"You'll not, that's certain," said Price knowingly, and glanced at Pardee cautiously.

"An, I'll be a good churchman, too," declared Kelly further.

"Oh, will you?" said Pardee.

"We'll sing now," broke in Price. "Here's one I didn't learn at the mother's knee."

"Haven't you got any sense, Price?" whispered Pardee in the other's ear.

"Mother!" yearned Babe, his lips a-tremble.

Pardee kicked out at Price's head and Price dodged.

"It all comes out with the singing," said Price and sang:

> "I wanted to go for a submarine,
> An' sail beneath the sea;
> I'd sling my bag on a submarine—
> Oh! That's the life for me.

"Which is a very proper song," said he proudly.

"For goodness sake stop it, Price!" cried Pardee, and flung himself astride the singer's head and they floundered in the water.

AT TEN that night they heard a scraping sound outside, a sort of metallic sound such as might be made by the links of a heavy chain being drawn slowly over the back of the boat. Hart and Burley, who were in conference over against the chain lockers, ceased their whisperings and listened.

Shortly the forward end of the boat was lifted cautiously, then began to ascend very slowly. The water, now about waist deep, flowed aft in rippling eddies. In a few moments the A-5 was standing almost on her stern, the men clinging to projections as they came to hand to keep from sinking back into the black waters below.

Suddenly the chain slipped and the boat sank back with a rush. The water again came forward in a torrent, sweeping the men from their supports like so many chips of wood. As the heavy motors snapped their bed-plate bolts and followed the swirl of water forward the lights went out.

Pardee came from the water gasping and clutching blindly, his hand providentially falling upon a ring-bolt in the accumulator gratings. Strangling, he dragged himself painfully from the water and flung himself on the gratings. His straining ears caught the faint sound of a cough below him.

He reached down and grabbed at the sound, his hand coming into contact with

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a wet blouse. He hauled the find to the gratings beside him.

"Who is it? For God's sake, who is it?" he panted.

"Mother Mary! It's filled with water I am!"

It was Kelly. He spat the water from his mouth and began to swear riotously, but Pardee struck him upon the head with his fist.

"Stop it!" he ordered wrathfully. "This is no time to swear—pray! Where are the rest of them? There ought to be a flasher hereabouts."

He clawed at the bulkhead behind him with his hands, and at length found a flasher in the rack. He pressed the button and a small beam of white light sprang out. Washed up against the gratings at his very feet he saw the white face of Hart, the blood streaming from a gash in his forehead.

Pardee looked at the white face strangely for a moment, then shrugged his shoulders and shifted the light. Farther down the passageway he saw the lank form of another man sprawled awkwardly across the tube, his head and feet dangling on either side for all the world like a sack of grain thrown over a barrel.

Pardee studied the scene before him. It was a riot. What had been a semblance of order but a short time before was now a tangle, and he wondered that a change so great could occur in so short a time. While he was speculating on this changed state of affairs his ear caught an almost inaudible moaning coming apparently from the direction of the lockers forward.

Wedged in between the "doctor" and a twisted stanchion he saw the white face of Babe. He quickly slid from the grating on which he sat and went to the boy.

"Come out of this, Babe," he said kindly, and tossed the unconscious form over his shoulder.

Somehow he got back to the grating and shoved his burden up before him. For some time he sat and panted from the great labor of his exertions, the while Kelly muttered absently in his ear. At length the mutterings wore on Pardee's taut nerves.

"Shut up, you blithering idiot!" he screamed.

Kelly turned his face and leered at Pardee drunkenly, then obediently closed his mouth with a snap and thereafter remained silent. Pardee turned his attention to the boy, and after splashing water in his face for a few moments had the satisfaction of seeing him open his eyes. The boy stared wild-eyed at Pardee.

"Where are we?" were his first words, then: "Where are the lights? Where's everything—the others?"

"Easy Babe, easy boy," calmed Pardee, catching the other's hand and patting it soothingly. "For the first, we're a thousand miles more or less under surface; second, the lights went out when we tipped back; third, everything has gone to the devil. Me and you, Babe, are all that's left, except Kelly here, and he's a maniac, I believe. We're up against it, Babe. Understand?"

The boy nodded.

"Ain't there nothing to eat?" he asked weakly after studying for a time over what Pardee had said.

"I'm afraid not; it would be all wet and nasty if there was—full of water, and your stomach wouldn't hold it long. You won't need anything to eat after a while," he added, which caused Babe to look up at him, gray and sickly in the white light of the flasher.

"I'm awful thirsty, Pardee," he said presently.

Pardee stifled a groan. So was he too thirsty, but surely there was nothing of fresh water in the wreck about them. For the sake of the boy, however, he left the grating and waded his way to the lockers, where in normal times small breakers of fresh water were stowed for emergencies.

The scuttle-butt he found inverted on the way, so that was out of the question. He searched about in the broken, smashed lockers, but they were quite devoid of breakers or anything else fit for salvage. He returned to the grating with empty hands, to the utter discontent of Babe. Kelly had disappeared.

"Where is he?" Pardee inquired of the boy, grasping his arm rather roughly.

"He's gone, Pardee," Babe replied calmly, his voice tired and spiritless. "He said he was tired of hanging on, so he fell off the grating and went somewhere down there. He said he'd be after going to hell anyway without a priest, so there wasn't any use delaying the trip any longer. Do you think he did, Pardee?"

"Did what?" said Pardee whose mind was not there.

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"Do you think he went to hell as he said?"

"Maybe," said Pardee; "maybe not."

"I'd like some of them biscuits what Wooly makes, wouldn't you, Pardee?" said Babe after an interval of silence, his breath coming thick and with great effort owing to the very bad air.

Pardee said nothing. For a long time—he did not know how long, for the darkness takes no note of passing time—he listened for a repetition of the sound from outside, but heard nothing.

"I guess they're doing all they can," he mused between hard-caught breaths. "I oughtn't to complain; it's my own fault. A man's a fool to come in for this sort of life; he ought to know something like this is bound to happen sooner or later. Yet he comes along in spite of it, and all for the few extra dollars he makes with the dives. It ain't worth it. Then when you're on the top side you're a bit comfortable and all that."

"WELL, good-by, Pardee, I guess I'll be going along with Kelly now," said Babe some time early in the morning after a hard night.

"Now, Babe! Say, what's the matter with you, boy? Stay here with me! Babe! Babe! For God's sake——"

He caught at the boy's blouse, but the bad air made it quite difficult for one man to hold another on a platform so small as the accumulator grating, and in the end Babe slipped off into the water. Pardee fell back exhausted and listened half-heartedly as if dreading the sound to follow Babe's disappearance. It came to him in a muffled, choking cough, a sick sort of gurgling, then all was still.

"There's me left," said Pardee after a time, and composed himself to wait.

For a long time he lay thus, his feet dangling overside into the lapping water. Ever now and then he heard, as if from a great distance, the bubbling of water as huge bubbles rose from the leaks and burst within the hull. In another hour the water lapped gently along his sides, but he made no move to avoid it. Up and up it crept snail-like until it kissed his cheeks; then it whispered in mocking little gurglings in his ears.

He did not move. He smiled to himself, the smile breaking off in a fit of strangling coughing as the water became insistent about the edges of his lips. His brain went wrong.

"Kelly's in hell—Price's dead—Burley's dead—Hart got his head cracked—he's an officer, too—just like us though after all—we only live to die—I'll be going soon—hope so." He ceased speaking for a moment to cough the water from his mouth. "There won't be no court-martials anyhow—nobody's fault——"

Again he stopped muttering to spit the water from his mouth, but it was a hopeless task and he finally desisted. So Pardee lay on his back on the accumulator grating and died. This, of course, was eminently proper under the circumstances.

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THAT HEATHEN CHINEE, O'LOONEY

by PATRICK CASEY

Author of "The Reprisal"

"SAM O'LOONEY, Laundry," the board was lettered above the steaming place where yellow coolies sweated over "gents'" starched shirts and "ladies'" lingerie; and thereby hangs a tale, or rather, as this is a story of the heathen Chinee, a pigtail.

Sam Wing first shuffled into the life of Perro Caliente one day near the end of the Spring round-up. And Perro Caliente received him, if not like a prodigal son, at least like the bearded lady was received by the one thousand and one other wives of Mr. Abdul Hamid, some time ago retired—only the reception committee of Perro Caliente wore chapperos, not harem skirts.

Perro Caliente was what might be termed a blotch of dry tobacco-juice on the chin of the Painted Desert in Arizona. It was as old as the alkali in which it smothered; as hot and thirst-consumed as—er Hel-ena, Montana. And it was dead. Or, as Nogales Pete Carahan was wont to say to the perpetually throat-parched audience in the Blind Pup—

"Gents, this yere town is nooter gender, 'dicative mode and past tense—as dead and done to a turn as a hot dawg!"

But that was before the boom, and the Chinaman, came to Perro Caliente.

A railroad, perhaps, brought the boom. Anyway, where on the fringes of the cattle-town had been only shifting sand-dunes, smothers of alkali dust, and gray wastes of tough mesquite and greasewood and ubiquitous *yucca radiosa*, sprung up overnight like a mushroom, almost, two new "restaurants," a blacksmith shop, three rival hostelries, eleven saloons, and a wonderful store where Stetsons, high-heeled boots, gloves, and even stiff white collars could be had for the necessary.

Whereupon, the little old cattle-town, bursting with pride at the change, dropped the time-honored and euphonious name of Perro Caliente and assumed the more lucid moniker of Hot Dog—which is the same thing in civilized lingo.

But that heathen Chinee. Before the boom and the Chinaman came, the Four Hundred of the then Perro Caliente had had their shirts, more often blue than white, laundered by certain Greaser washerwomen and Indian squaws. But even the Four Hundred raised a kick at having to appear at the old, original Blind Pup Palace, or the Chapultepec Hotel, with a sable brand on their shirt-bosoms, caused by the laundress deserting the hot flat-iron for the hotter *olla* full of mescal.

As for the *nouveau riche* not in society—Injun Steve Harris, the breed, and Slop Hogan, the town sot—neither had felt the lack nor the need of a good laundry, as both refused, point-blank, to wash at all.

Now, with the other beacons of the boom, had come to Hot Dog a sure-enough laundry and the first Chinese—an inscrutable old Mongol, with a yellow, "no-sabe" face and a "me-sabe-a-doggone-whole-lot" pair of eyes.

He certainly did sabe how to starch and iron shirts, without leaving heraldic tracings. The reception committee, got up as

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a lynching party on account of the Yellow Peril he personified, came around to voting him a blessing for delivering them from the washerladies they had known. And, for want of a better and more Christian place to have their laundry done, the Four Hundred of Hot Dog patronized that heathen Chinee with the sly, slant eyes.

The two other citizens mentioned, but really unmentionable, still failed to part with their shirts and neckerchiefs long enough to have them washed by the heathen. At that, Sam Wing might have refused the job, and upon other grounds than mere rush of business.

For that heathen Chinee surely did a rushing business. A few weeks and he discarded the original shack and rented a new place in Bueno Road, put up a huge sign, "Sam Wing, Laundry," over the door and imported a half-dozen coolies from San Francisco to do the "washee-washee," while he took in the money and wrote out uncanny laundry checks with a foxy old smile.

And then, for Samuel Wing and his six yellow boys, the deluge!

IT WAS all on account of the coming of Emile Le Brun. That slick and slight young Frenchman, who treasured a mustache like one of Injun Steve's eyebrows and spouted French as Nogales Carahan's six-shooter spouted lead, popped up in a shack next to that of Jerry Mahoney, the horse-shoer, and but two doors removed from Sam Wing's joint.

"City of Paris French Laundry, Emile Le Brun" was the sign he put over the door of the shack where he and his frog-eater of a brother set to work over wash-tub and ironing-board "allee samee" Sam Wing, the first Chinese.

The Four Hundred gasped and gaped. Crazy Comanches! Two laundries! That *was* going some! But as Nogales Carahan remarked to that aforementioned audience in the Blind Pup Palace:

"It sure is a gloryous rejoov'nation, gents. Now we has two steam, roller-press la'ndries tuh choose betwixt."

And the Four Hundred chose.

"Frog-eaters is wus as can be!" said Nogales. "They is without enny sense o' decency—th' devil's own! They makes th' doggone hobble an' Deerectwar skirts, an' even tries tuh make 'em w'ar pants! Yes, siree! An' what's more, I sees this here polly-voo boy look side-eyes at Royal-Flush Teresa! Say, gents, if we don't be mighty careless, he may turn out tuh be a dook, or vikcount, or some other o' these yere royalties, an' elope with Teresa, or p'rhaps th' Widder Peters!"

He paused to bolt down a small glass of red-brown liquor, then clinched his argument, with:

"But if Frenchies is bad, gents, yellow perils and sich is consid'able wus! Bein' rat-eaters, they is pizen compared to frog-eaters. 'Nother thing, they is heathens! Yes, gents, Frenchies is bad, but heathen Chinks is consid'able wus. Tharfore, gents, we will patronize that yellow peril, Sam Wing, not another doggone minute! This yere dook, Le Broon, gits our trade harafter!"

That decided it. Three-Finger Joe, Doc Emmett, Royal Bowers, the gunman called .44 Mordecai, Pah-Ute Potts, Slim Canby, Candle-Clipper Flynn, the C-bar-B boys, the Half-Circle-S boys, the Crazy-L crowd, the Chain Lightning push, and the dozen other gangs of punchers from down the Little Colorado way, liquoring up in the Blind Pup at that time, were with Nogales to a man. For not only was his argument good and sound, but Carahan was a bad hombre with whom to diverge on opinions, being the quickest trigger-twitcher in the Painted Desert region.

And so it fell that, of a sudden, poor Sam Wing and his six yellow coolies found they were boycotted without a shirt to "washee-washee," or a collar to iron. Searching about for the cause, Sam saw the industrious Le Brun and his brother shrugging their shoulders in despair before such a pile of wash and such a line of customers as would take them weeks to serve and get rid of.

Now, at that, most Chinamen would have believed themselves accursed by all their ten billion gods and devils, and taken to burning prayer-papers to the outraged spirits. Not a few would have taken to the pipe and pill. But Sam Wing was a wise Chinaman—the heathen Chinee Bret Harte wrote of, perhaps—and he did neither.

He may have noticed a curious thing. Most of the stores and all the saloons in the boom town bore signs with oddly similar names, to wit: "The Blind Pup Palace—J. J. O'Rooney, prop."; "The Swell Restauraw—No Flies Admitted—Fat Sullivan,

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mgr."; "Jerry Mahoney, Blacksmith"; "Mike McCann—Fine Liquors," and so forth, *ad lib.*

He must have noticed that of all the business places in Hot Dog one particular place did the most business of any; the rich Hibernian name over its swing doors seemed to attract the largest crowd of customers; for puncher after cattleman was continually and continuously passing in and out of it, waiting strings of horses were always pawing the dust before it.

It was not the blacksmith shop, the restaurants, nor the hotels. Not even O'Houlihan's old, reliable Red Nose Saloon. It was the Blind Pup Palace! And the name that to poor, heathenish Sam Wing seemed so sweet to the tongues of his ten thousand good-luck joss was that of the proprietor, J. J. O'Rooney.

As said before, Sam Wing was a wise Chinaman. He thought to borrow that lucky name, O'Rooney; it was so apt to bring trade. So he said with much labor to Terry Moriarity, the handy man of the town:

"Me want makee sign. You sabe?"

Of course the old Irishman did, but what he wanted to know was what was wrong with the old sign-board.

"Me no likee him no more. Burn him allee samee firewood. Me makee sign allee samee saloon man."

"All right, me foine mandarin friend. Would this do for a sign-board?"

And he brought forth a smooth piece of timber.

"That allee light. Now you put namee on it. Sabe?"

"But phwat name?"

"You waitee. Namee allee samee hard to spik. Allee samee fine 'Melican namee. O—O'Loo—now me catchum—O'Looney! You sabe? Allee samee namee, O'Looney! Allee light! You put down samee fine board—O'Looney, Sam O'Looney!"

"What! Sam O'Looney!"

The wily heathen Chinee grinned from ear to ear.

"You sabe!" he hopped around in glee. "Sam O'Looney—allee samee likee Mistle O'Looney, allee samee Blind Pup!"

"Begorrah! It must be Joe O'Rooney you're shp'aking av!"

And it was. But Wing's tongue had played him a sorry trick. Being Chinese, he had found it impossible to mouth the R in O'Rooney. However, as luck would have it, that Chinese slip of the tongue hit upon a name which, though not the same as that of the proprietor of the Blind Pup, at least was as distinctly Celtic in ring. And so, in due season, appeared above the door of Sam Wing's "washee" house a new sign reading, "Sam O'Looney, Laundry."

Now it so happened that Terry Moriarity, the man of all works, was a quiet, sober sort, who stayed away nights from the brilliant lights of the Blind Pup Palace and the Red Nose Saloon. And so, at no explanation forthcoming, the interest and excitement over Sam Wing's simple change went up, up, until at last a committee of the leading lights decided to wait upon that heathen Chinee of the "no-sabe" smile.

"Wing," said that usual spokesman, Nogales Carahan, "this yere change of sign-boards has made my fellow-citizens plumb locoed. What's the meanin', if I may be so introodin' as tuh inwesteegate? Y'u bein' a heathen Chinee, we don't calc'late tuh allow enny sich shell-game like changin' signs."

As Carahan ceased speaking, the Celestial turned his eyes from the belts and holsters of the investigating committee and broke into a broad, yellow grin.

"Allight, Mistle Calahan! You allee samee fine 'Melican mans! You no shoot-em poor China boy, Sam? Allight! Allee light, Mistle Calahan! I sabe——"

"Hurry up and tell us, you blamed Cherokee!" put in Doc Emmett. "Did you sell the joint to a white man? Did some galoot, O'Looney, buy you out?"

Sam Wing broke out into that silly grin again and nodded his head and pigtail violently.

"You catchum! You allee samee catchum sabe!" he bubbled over. "You sabe change of signs! Wing he sellum washee-washee! Fine 'Melican, Sam O'Looney, he catchee washee-washee! Wing he catchum whollot finee money! Sabe?"

Nogales turned to the men behind him, at that.

"It's jes' as we plumb thought, pards. Wing here has sold out his unremooneraytive la'ndry business to some galoot branded Sam O'Looney."

Then to the still grinning and nodding Chinaman—

"Who be this sport O'Looney, Wing?"

"O'Looney, Sam O'Looney? He allee

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samee fine spolt—likee you!" the heathen Chinee answered gleefully. "He 'Flisco man. He come allee samee 'Flisco to Wing. Wing, he sellum washee-washee. Wing, he catchum allee samee steamboat to Canton, allee samee go back home. Sam O'Looney, he makee washee-washee allee samee use um China boys."

He indicated the six mule-like coolies on the tables behind him.

"Allee samee me thinkum Sam O'Looney getee stlung!"

At that, the investigation committee well-nigh guffawed the roof down. They so appreciated Wing's wit that they invited him to "catchum dlink" over at the Blind Pup, but the smooth old heathen wisely refused. And then, completely satisfied, the committee adjourned to that selfsame Blind Pup to liquor up on the news.

Of course, followed another debate in the Blind Pup. Who should be the one to receive the patronage of the elect of Perro Caliente—this newcomer, Sam O'Looney, or the Gaul, Emile Le Brun?

"Frog-eaters is all right," remarked the irrepressible Carahan. "When it comes tuh pickin' betwixt a heathen Chinee or a Frenchy, why a Frenchy for my hand every time. Them for yours trooly even ahead of Eyetalians or Swades! But when a sure-'nough American hits th' range, like this yere hoss-wrangler O'Looney, why y'u betcher it's th' American every time! So O'Looney it is, gents. He sure must be an American, like y'u and me, from that name. An' he gits our trade, y'u bet!"

So, at the word of Nogales Carahan, the Mississippi of collars, shirts, handkerchiefs and neckerchiefs was diverted once more and flowed, no longer to France, but through the gates of China to the Emerald Isle. And so, all of a sudden, six sweating coolies found work in plenty, and a bland old Chinee raked in disk after disk of money, as he had done once before.

That was the curious part. The signboard flaunted the name of Sam O'Looney, yet no one ever saw Sam O'Looney, the proprietor. And Sam Wing, the heathen Chinee, did not disappear to return to China, as he had said he would. Instead, there he sat among his sweating slaves, smiling blandly and explaining:

"Mistle O'Looney, he stay in 'Flisco. He no likee come to Pello Cal'ente. He likum high life too muchee. He fixee me, Sam Wing, bossee of washee-washee lanch. Sabe? Me makee money, me. makee China boy washee flo Sam O'Looney. He stay in 'Flisco an' getee money. You sabe?"

The town "sabe-ed"—or thought it did. Leastwise, all the Four Hundred's wash continued to stampede down upon the wily Wing and his half-dozen coolies. And poor Emile Le Brun, with a last final shrug of the shoulders, closed up the City of Paris French Laundry and returned in disgust to Phœnix.

And then the storm broke.

IT WAS St. Patrick's Day. And that, in the Painted Desert country, and this particular town of Hot Dog, was like saying the time when all the holidays fell on the same date.

The celebration started at daybreak with the racing into town of the Chain Lightning boys, Red O'Hara at their head, pistols spouting fire at every lunge of their horses. And all the morning the desert emptied alkali-coated riders, each whooping and trying to shoot up the burg in better style than the preceding party, the echoes of whose shots still rang over the wastes.

For all this display of patriotism, there was not much green in evidence. St. Patrick's Day in Hot Dog was but Fourth of July and All Fools' Day in one. Some of the celebrators did not know which it was, and cared less to know.

The bar of the Blind Pup Palace was five deep with waiting punchers that night when Nogales Pete Carahan burst through the swing doors and opened up with two pistols and a whoop.

"Gents!" he cried, leather-lunged. "Gents, we has been buncoed! We has been rustled like a lot of blind steers! And by a heathen Chinee, d'ye hear?"

The crowd in O'Rooney's stared at him in confounded amazement. And he stood six feet four, swaying in the doorway and confronting them with a red face which told of drink and fury, and two huge guns. Behind him surged a mob of punchers from the other saloons, twice as many as were in the populous Blind Pup Palace.

"Gents," Nogales went on more soberly, "Terry Moriarity was celebratin' tuhday an' he opened his trap. I got it straight from him. Sam Wing has made a passel of jackasses out o' us! Th' heathen faked

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that sale of his joint! He made up that name, Sam O'Looney! *Thar is no sich man!*"

At that, the Blind Pup Palace went wild. And the mob outside broke loose in unison. Pistol shots, cries of anger, demands for vengeance, filled the air. And then that gunman, Nogales Carahan, leaped upon the bar and shouted above the riot:

"Gents, it's up tuh us Americans tuh give this lyin' Chinee a lesson! He insulted every one har with an Irish name! So, gents, down with th' yellow-belly tuhnight, right now!"

"Lynch him!"

"Blow the heathen up with dynamite!"

"Tar an' feather him!"

And red of face and furious, the whisky-crazed crowd surged out of the saloon and swept across the road toward the shack, where still boldly swung that sign, "Sam O'Looney, Laundry."

Ensued an angry fusillade at the blatant board, a catapulting of bodies against the stout door, loud threats and blasphemous requests for the heathen Chinee to come out, 'fess up and be lynched.

Within all was dread and terror. Those seven, almond-eyed Orientals went a shade yellower and sweated more in fear of the foreign devils than ever they had sweated over the hottest irons. And one old, wizened Celestial lost his "no-sabe" smile and was half-crazed with terror.

At last, sheer desperation spurred Sam Wing to stare out a window at the mob. Instantly smote his ears a volley of shouts and calls for him to admit he was Sam O'Looney and be hanged in reality. Or else produce the real Sam O'Looney!

The Chinaman ducked back. And the mob whooped fearfully and bombarded the door so that the shack shook in every timber. Sam Wing chattered to his six coolies, and all seven stole to the rear door and peered out.

The house was indeed surrounded, but the few armed guards who made up the cordon seemed greatly interested in the assault on the front of the shack. So the heathen Chinee decided that escape might be had by a desperate sortie between the outposts toward the open desert.

A crash and echoing shout apprised the quaking Orientals of the battering in of the front door.

Sam Wing squealed, slammed open the door and dashed down the little gully that sloped away from the back of the house. And then his fear-filled followers, with queer, Oriental cries, saw him stumble over some dark object in the bottom of the gully and turn a complete somersault on his head.

That alarmed the guards. They came racing near, whooping and discharging their pistols. And the coolies, trapped like so many rats, leaped back within-doors, dragging after them poor Sam Wing, who, in turn, dragged the object he had stumbled over in the dark!

It was the town sot, Slop Hogan.

Sam Wing, with the aid of a match, made that out, even as a volley of shots thudded against the back door and whoops from the front of the house told of the punchers searching there for him and his six coolies. Furthermore, he saw that Hogan was dead drunk, a sublime condition that gentleman attained whenever he could beg sufficient drinks.

"Hoolee!" he howled above the storm of the searchers' oaths.

Then he chattered like a typewriter in Cantonese to his men. A rush by the six to a near-by tub of hot water, and then the whole warm Niagara came cataracting down upon the head of Slop Hogan. Another tub, this time of cold water, and Hogan woke partially out of his drunken state.

Then Sam Wing leaped to the red-hot stove and grabbed up a huge flatiron so hot he need must hold it far from him in a flannel handgrip. And then, while the six, shaking Chinese held Hogan on every side, Wing ran up behind and touched the flatiron to the small of his back.

"Ouch!"

The drunkard leaped almost a mile in air. His clothing was stiff and hot against his back. Then a string of fearful oaths straight from his heart.

But Sam Wing, having let the town sot feel his teeth, now stopped him short with a frenzied chatter:

"Sloppee Hogan you catchum flat-ilon allee samee white shirtee! No do what Sam Wing say, Sam Wing him lallup you allee samee flat-ilon! Sabe? Sloppee Hogan you allee samee Sam O'Looney! Catchum sabe? You allee samee Sam O'Looney! You tellem 'Melicans! You bossee! You allee samee Sam O'Looney!"

Again and again, the desperate Chinaman shrilled that command, the while the

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iron breathed hot against the drunkard's back.

And Hogan certainly did "sabe!" He must do what this heathen Chinee said, tell the men raising the hullaballoo in front that he was Sam O'Looney and the owner of the laundry, or die the death of a starched shirt—have that hot flat-iron pressed with all the torture of the damned against his back. So, sober as a judge and scared as a jackrabbit, he gave hoarse assent and was dragged by those frantic Asiatics toward the front of the shack.

"Come on out, you dinged yellow-bellies!" Nogales Carahan was shouting, at the same time discharging his firearms under the tables, when the old calico curtain at the far end of the long work-room was pulled aside and in the doorway thus disclosed appeared seven very yellow Chinese and a livid-faced white man.

Cried Carahan:

"Slop Hogan, or I'm a Choctaw! An' that heathen Chinee, Sam Wing!"

The torch-bearing mob stood dumb and astounded, staring at the lead-hued Hogan, the six, sickly yellow coolies on either side of him, and the old, wizened Sam Wing peering over his shoulder from behind.

And then, in the stillness, Hogan gasped out:

"Pards, I'm th' galoot what owns this yere shop! I 'fess up tuh th' truth, gents! I'm Sam O'Looney——"

"Y'u? Yuh rum-drinkin' Injun!"

"Y'u Sam O'Looney, yuh cow-rustlin' tarrapin!"

"Slop Hogan—Sam O'Looney!"

There were those that found it impossible to believe; a few that suspected a ruse; but the main portion of the mob did not pause to doubt the livid-faced Hogan. They could not see the flat-iron at his back. So, baffled in the plan to celebrate St. Patrick's Day fittingly, the lynching committee drew off to the other end of the long room to discuss this astounding state of affairs.

"Slop Hogan that was always a-beggin' drinks off'n every drunken puncher, always obfooscated under our cayuses' hoofs—an' him th' owner of this yere joint, him Sam O'Looney, th' proprieaytor!" gasped little, frock-coated Doc Emmett, the politician of the town. "An' jes' tuh think, gents, how dark an' low he kept the pardnarship! Why, ut's like high an' frenzied fynance! Reminds me of how those yere capt'ns of industry do things—reminds me of Standard Ile an' John B. Rockygie! That's what!"

"Wal, what yuh goin' tuh do 'bout it?" growled big Carahan, surly at having his fun thus spoiled. "Fade away like a bunch o' Greasers? Leave this yere thievin' an' swindlin' yellow peril, Sam Wing, an' that bum, Hogan, ter haw-haw at us over the onparalleled sooccess of their cattle-rustlin' scheme?"

He banged his hand down upon one of the frail ironing-boards so that it jumped.

"Not by a long shot, gents! We've got to pay this yere heathen Chinee an' that Rockygie of a Slop Hogan for this yere bit of slick work! They can't fool us Hot Dawgers an' git off! Gents, we'll lynch 'em both!"

"Sure! Lynch 'em! Lynch th' seven heathens an' Slop Hogan—he's no use, anyway!"

Doc Emmett leaped, at that, upon the ironing-board and almost upon Carahan's big pistol paw.

"Boys! Not lynchin'! This yere case ain't serious 'nough. Lynchin' 's for cattle-rustlers, wife-bruisers, an' sich. This yere is like a case o' gun-play—merely a penal o'fence. We must pay back Hogan an' th' yellow-bellies, but not by lynchin', gents. Ride 'em on a rail out o' town, tar an' feather 'em! Say, pards, I've got a whopper of a scheme!"

And he sprung down and whispered in their ears for a short space. With a whoop and hot fusillade of shots, the mob accepted his plan of vengeance. And then every last one of them stampeded out of that "washee-washee" house, leaving those seven, shaking Chinese and the livid-complexioned Hogan alone in the dark.

THE six coolies who had read death in the white men's eyes, and Sam Wing who had overheard a word or two of their plot, cringed in terror. And Slop Hogan, who also had heard, went hot and cold by turns, and could only gasp, again and again:

"Lord A'mighty! O Lord A'mighty!"

And then the mob was back with mesquite bushes and dry tinder wood which they piled about the front of the shack. Thereupon, chalk-faced Slop Hogan, the color blanched even from his red nose, the lean, old Chinese,

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and his six crazed coolies saw Nogales Carahan and little Doc Emmett come forward, with several sticks of dynamite in their hands!

But what they failed, in their terror, to note was the way the two ringleaders placed those sticks among the inflammable wood.

The Perro Calientes had decided that the crime of Wing, Hogan, *et al.*, was not grave enough for lynching, or anything of that order, that the heathen Chinee and his men and the sot were to be given a good scare—the scare of their lives. Hence, while to all appearances the dynamite was for deadly destructive work, it really was thrown loose among the wood, like powder, which would explode with a great smoke and flare and fire.

A ten-minute train of powder was laid toward the wood and concealed dynamite. And, at this, the poor, supposed victims would have dashed out of the doomed house had they not well known they would be hurled back into the trap by the wall of waiting punchers.

And then, while that wall withdrew a pace and held its breath, big Carahan grabbed some one's lighted cigar and touched it to the end of the long, winding fuse.

A sizzle and gleam! The pinhead of fire slithered and slid along the ground in a zigzag for the window where wily Sam Wing, pasty-faced Hogan, and the shivering coolies waited and watched.

"Now y'u yellow-belies! Now yuh'll l'arn what ut means tuh try tuh rope Americans! An' y'u, too, yuh bum!"

"Allight, Mistle Calahan! Allee light!" It was old Sam Wing shrilling in sheer desperation. "Me Sam Wing no caree! Me likum kickoff! An' you, 'Melican mans, you catchum kickoff, too! Sabe?"

Then in a wild, ear-piercing screech:

"Sam Wing die! 'Melican mans die! I glot five tlousand pounds dynamite an' cannon clackers from 'Flisco in cellah flo Foulth Jooly! Me getem to sellee you allee samee celeblate! Now we allee die—togethel—one blig *bang!*"

The snake of red fire gained another foot ere that black wall of men recovered from the shocking discovery so cleverly wrapped by old Sam Wing in his screeched words. Then, with oaths and ashing of leathery faces, that whole human wall turned tail and fled, each man for himself.

That heathen Chinee chattered. A rush by his six coolies to the water-breaker. Up went the window. Six puff-cheeked Chinese faces protruded.

A cry in Cantonese from Wing. *Swish!* Six streams of water shot from each practised Chinese mouth and fell upon the head of that crawling cobra of fire. Instantly it was quenched, dead.

Thereupon, out of the barricaded door after a minute's breathless exertion, dashed those seven chattering Chinese and that one white man who tottered with fright, then, as often before he had tottered with drink.

Those Hot Doggers, waiting at the far fringes of the mushroom town among the soap-weed, armless cactus, evil choya and stinging alkali, nor heard nor felt the earth-shaking report of a cellar-full of dynamite and Fourth of July pyrotechnics. Neither did they ever again see Sam Wing and his coolies, nor Slop Hogan.

Hogan, who never could dissuade himself that all of it was not an exceptionally fine attack of the D. T.'s, journeyed via the brake-beams to San Francisco where I found him still pursuing the same occupation that had won him such fame in Hot Dog, formerly Perro Caliente.

And that sly old heathen, Sam Wing, *alias* Sam O'Looney, shuffled silently through the dark with his six slaves along the Santa Fe tracks to parts unknown.

And it was well. For when the Four Hundred of Hot Dog, led by big Nogales Pete Carahan, wandered through the deserted shack of that heathen Chinee, they found no cellar, no basement—not to speak of dynamite and cannon crackers.

They had their revenge. They finished the celebration of St. Patrick's Day in fitting style by riddling with bullets that trouble-maker of a sign, "Sam O'Looney, Laundry," and burning to the ground the "washee-washee" house of that heathen Chinee.

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The EPIC of SILVER KING

by ARTHUR JAMES HAYES

KAYLOOK, the blaze-faced husky, had roamed the silent places of the Tanana hills with Tlahkit, the great white wolf. So it befell that one of the two tiny puppies who strove to stand erect upon wobbly legs, in the burrow by the white waters of Kechumstuk's brawling rapids, had a face and breast slashed with sheerest white, like his husky mother, and boasted elsewhere, a pelt of frosted silver. In his veins was the blood of Tlahkit the Truculent, whom the Yaheets feared as the plague, and the white and breed trappers romanced about.

Six weeks after his eyes had opened to the gloom of the burrow, he ventured forth and chased a white ptarmigan to the edge of the Kechumstuk. There the wily old cock flew off, but the wolf-puppy stumbled clumsily and cascaded with dry spruce needles into the foam-crested, amber water. He might have yelped his terror but Kechumstuk slammed him against a submerged boulder and choked his outcry with a flood that burned in his throat and roared with a loud menace in his ears.

Half a mile down-stream Courtleigh Travenell reached out of his canoe and grasped a tiny ball of sodden fur. It collapsed forlornly in the canoe and there lay without breath or movement.

"*Sacrê!*" said old Pierre, who plied the stern paddle. "Eet ees ze yoong wolf, mebbeso, drown' as tevil!"

Travenell stared at the little creature critically.

"Maybe not," he replied. "At all events we'll try a little first-aid procedure on him."

He held the puppy up by his draggled tail and gently pressed the flexible ribs with his fingers. Pierre, intent upon the operation, permitted the canoe to drift broadside down-stream.

A minute or two passed. Then the wolf-cub coughed, squirmed and choked. Travenell essayed to supplement his endeavors with further manipulation. But the silver-pelted one writhed in his grasp and fastened tiny white teeth in his thumb.

The young Englishman cursed and shook him loose. Pierre roared exultantly. The wolf-cub crouched down between the cedar struts in the extreme bow and bared his baby fangs in a grimace of defiance. Travenell laved his bleeding hand with river water.

"The little beggar's game," he said, with admiration kindling in his blue eyes. "I'll say though, he's a trifle short on gratitude."

He wrapped up the injured member with a white silk handkerchief and reached again for the young wolf. The latter's tiny teeth fastened in vain upon the pliable buckskin glove. He struggled and yelped dismally, only to be enveloped in a knapsack dungeon, where his cries quickly subsided.

The white water of the Kechumstuk had ceased to sing in his ears, and here was a

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sheltering gloom like the blackness of his home burrow. He licked his boulder-bruised shoulders and stretched himself out for slumber.

TRAVENELL suffered no one to feed the blaze-faced puppy but himself, and within the week the silver-pelted one was toddling about at his heels. All Summer, while the half-breed and the young Englishman toiled among the gold-bearing black sands in the quiet blacklash of the Kechumstuk cataracts, the son of Tlahkit the Truculent lay on the mossy back above and watched his master's every movement with alert black eyes.

Sometimes the arrogant drumming of a cock partridge would send him on a belly-squirming quest into the cedar thickets beyond. But though he washed his white muzzle in the arrogant cock's musk-scented blood, he always returned to his avid watching of Travenell moiling for "dust" where the back currents of Kechumstuk had swept and dropped it.

On such little forays, the spirit of Tlahkit the morose and solitary tugged at his heart and urged him farther into the silent green aisles of scrub cedar and stunted spruce. But the ominous silence of the great drowsy wilderness struck fear into his being. Shadows were everywhere, and underfoot was a yielding muskeag cushion that permitted of the noiseless approach of hostile feet.

He crouched low in the little thicket, in moss littered with the blood-spattered brown feathers of the partridge, and stared with his long oblique eyes into the forest that waited and watched and was silent. Then if a twig cracked somewhere about him, he yelped his consternation and scuttled back to where Travenell and Pierre panned interminably for the red flakes in the black muck. For in his veins was also the blood of Kaylook, the blaze-faced.

He was almost as tall as the grown malamutes when the November gales drove the swirling snow up the evergreen gorges. Pierre, admittedly a connoisseur in the matter, summoned sundry of the Saints to attest that he was the greatest husky ever whelped in the Tanana fastnesses. And his appearance was no less striking than his size.

Arrogance that was of the essence of Tlahkit gave a poise to his head and a grace to his stride that marked him as one of a different caste from the spiritless malamutes. He lifted his forefeet daintily and held them arched perceptibly in air, before placing them again upon the ground. When his red fangs drew back in the long leering wolf smile, they revealed teeth larger and stronger and whiter than those of the dogs who fed from the hands of man.

For the teeth inherited from the slayer of men and moose were of a mold superior to those of the eaters of sun-dried salmon. He courted combat with youthful temerity, and always with opponents he sensed vulnerable. By January he had vanquished five of the eight dogs, and the melting snows of April witnessed his memorable battle with Kametz, who led.

The battle-scarred veteran from the Asiatic side of Bering fought with nonchalant wariness, but the son of Tlahkit fought with his sire's genius, pivoting like lightening, dancing in and out bafflingly, and stumbling, anon, deceptively, for the belly-ripping slash that sprinkled the sodden snow with the mongrel leader's blood.

The teeth of the feeder on sun-dried salmon tried in vain for the juglar. The long white hair of the wolf-dog foiled their blunted points, and his own razor-edged tusks ripped relentlessly from shoulder to shank.

Travenell separated them finally, with whip of green rawhide, but Kametz, whimpering, crept with his crushed forefeet into the shadows that lengthened in the cedar thickets. For with the instinct of his kind, he wanted no other eyes to see him die.

When the snow lay like sprinkled blue diamond-dust in the ghost radiance of the steel-tinted night sky, and the writhing red and green fingers of the aurora hissed and beckoned over the spiked silhouette of spruce tops, the wolf-dog raised his lean muzzle to the fastness of the frost-fastened firmament above and howled.

Pierre, upon hearing, would make the sign of the cross, and then mutter uneasy curses, for the quavering wail of the wolf-dog was strangely like the lilting song of Tlahkit the Truculent, killer of moose and men.

But though the cold and the stillness and the ghost shadows sent strange moods thrilling through his frame, the wolf-dog shrank from penetrating the dense wall of spruce that hedged the tiny clearing. For

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other howls, long and eery and aquiver with the inexorable threat of the wilderness, answered his own. And when the snowfall was light, and the deer and moose failed to yard, the wolves came close in about the clearing. From the door of the cabin, the son of Tlahkit watched them.

They came by twos and threes, and ranged themselves in a great arc, their eyes gleaming green and their skinny forms ranging dim and uncertain against the background of spruce. Their long jaws hung open, and their slender tongues drooled with famished expectancy. And the son of the wolf crouched with the other malamutes about the door, and they snarled with a malevolence that carried no conviction. But the wolf-dog's ruff always bristled ferociously, and his snarl had a vibrant resonance that caused even the wary old wolf leader to stir uneasily.

Yet the son of Tlahkit crouched with the other slaves of the trace beneath the light of the cabin window. For in his blood was the blood of Kaylook, the slumberer by Yaheet camp-fires, and the eater of bacon rinds and sun-dried salmon.

SPRING with its myriads of droning mosquitoes and its torturing heat, saw the wolf-dog stretched again above the crumbling bank where Pierre and Travenell ceaselessly sifted the black sands of Kechumstuk. He was taller now than any husky. His snow-white chest was deeper, and his muzzle longer and leaner. When the others' tails trailed dejectedly, his curled crisply, and he trotted with a jaunty assurance that brought the kindling gleam of admiration again into Travenell's eyes.

November witnessed him plunging and snapping in the choking clutch of the moosehide collar. The others of the team had ancient scores to adjust and entered into the spirit of the thing with a vengeance. When he threw himself prone, the others responded to Pierre's profane injunction to "mush leetle bit" and the son of Tlahkit was dragged until the landscape blurred and blackened before his eyes.

By chance he gained his feet, and simultaneously his straining lungs drank in a gulp of crisp cool air. The wolf-dog was broad between the oblique eyes, and he reasoned well that it were better to walk and run with the others than be dragged by the moosehide collar. He reasoned too, that it was preferable to throw his broad shoulders into the straining bands than to endure the stinging play of Pierre's lean rawhide.

In a week he was pulling with the best of them. In a month he had succeeded to leadership.

His pride of accomplishment was inordinate, and his discipline inexorable. He punished indiscriminately and without fear or favor. When three months of steady toil had burned the fat of leisure living out of his frame he weighed in the Golden Ghost Saloon, at Fairbanks, one hundred and fifty-three pounds.

His fame as a fighter spread from Rampart to Dawson. He killed Aleek, hitherto invincible, at Yellow Bear, and fought off five huskies simultaneously at Forty Mile. Pierre would have pitted him for wagers, but Travenell forbade.

When Pierre was permitted to take the team alone to Valdez, his enthusiasm overcame his scruples against violating Travenell's injunction. McCarrick shook a thousand dollars under his nose in the Sourdough bar and said the wolf-dog couldn't stay five minutes with Kenai Billie.

The half-breed succumbed to taunts and sore temptation. Half of Valdez witnessed that battle, and they talk of it today when the heyday of the dog-team is past. Kenai Billie, fawn-colored and rangy, boasted almost as large a repertory of tricks as the silver-pelted one. But he had never seen an adversary stumble until groggy and beaten. When the son of Tlahkit, with his white chest dyed crimson with his own blood swayed on tired limbs, Kenai Billie's blunt shoulder drove in for the upset and exposed the juglar.

But the son of the white wolf wilted so supinely that there was none of the resistance expected. The fawn-colored one went on over him, and the white tusks inherited from the slayer of big game, crunched through both forelegs, before he could recover. The crippled husky faced him on his knees, with bared fangs and flashing eyes, but the wolf-dog leaped lightly over him and his jaws closed on Kenai Billie's spine.

Men who had witnessed human tragedies with apathetic mien, coughed huskily and wiped their eyes with the sleeves of their mackinaws. For Kenai Billie, a prime

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favorite, had "gone out" gamely. And they of the wilderness make a fetish of stoical courage. It is the North Country's first and final commandment.

Men christened the victor "Silver King" and Pierre told Travenell the story of the great fight, omitting all trivial details pointing to his connivance in the matter. Travenell had been calling him "Aurora" and Pierre "Mooshook" but by common consent he became Silver King. It was a fit designation, they thought.

Spring came, and the season of lingering mists and dripping trees found Silver King emancipated from the traces and questing far up in the Tanana Hills. He slept in the lee of windfalls and hunted the timid brown rabbits for meat and diversion. One drowsy afternoon, when the longing for Travenell's quiet voice and infrequent caresses was strong upon him, there chanced that which made him a slayer of wolves.

He was loping noiselessly down the sun-flecked trail through the scrub-pine of Hanging Shadows. Around a bend in the old deer runway, a gray shadow flitted. The approaching wolf stopped with bunched feet and stared at the son of Tlahkit with wondering eyes, for the wolf-dog had been working up the wind. Then she squatted down in the trail, and her slant eyes narrowed in the lean-lipped smile that might mean derision or invitation.

The shimmering tail of the great dog curled more crisply, and he trotted forward with his lean head proudly poised and his feet arched daintily. The young female made as if to flee. But before she could do so, there was a crackling in the underbrush, and a lean and battle-scarred old pack-leader interposed his bulk between her and the advancing husky.

The proud carriage of Silver King altered in a trice. His lean head went lower than his shoulder, and was thrust sharply forward. The hair of his ruff raised its glistening four inches in a quivering collar. And his lips writhed back in the deep-throated, vibrating snarl that had made the wolf-pack of Kechumstuk shrink apprehensively from the window of Travenell's cabin. The wolf snarled too, and in a little sun-patterned glade they circled in the stiff-legged preliminary dance. Then Silver King rushed.

The wary old wolf leaped adroitly aside and with a slashing snap slit the other's hide over the flat tendons of the left shoulder. Silver King had feasted heavily on rabbits. And the moss made the footing slow.

Again they circled, and the son of Tlahkit pivoted on the inner circle, which is the defensive. The scarred wolf danced in, slashing his bigger antagonist below the eye, and shredding his ear on the getaway. Silver King missed for the throat, and the silently fighting timber-wolf came clear, without a hair damaged. On a little hummock of green muskeag, the female watched them, her pink tongue lolling and her eyes half shut in the wolf grin of enjoyment.

For half an hour they fought, until Silver King, the feeder on rabbits, was stained crimson with his own blood. His breath came in short pants, and the area where they fought was beaten flat with his defensive circling. It was useless to rush the forest dweller. He melted before the wolf-dog's blood-filled eyes as noiselessly and completely as a shadow. And each retaliatory play for the crimson throat was a trifle surer. The last sharp click had started blood in a tiny trickle, from a point just over the juglar.

Silver King's knees shook, and his stiff-legged stride faltered. It was the beginning of the end. And the wolf sensed it. Never before had an antagonist faltered, until the time was ripe for the finishing shoulder thrust that would leave the throat exposed. He gathered his steel muscles for the final endeavor. Then he hurled his bulk against the crimson, slashed shoulder.

But there was no impact! Where the shoulder should have met with shoulder, only the wolf's knees encountered the foe. He carried over with the force of his lunge, and his lean muzzle ploughed up the moss. Before he could recover, Silver King's great jaws had set like a steel vise in the lean part of his back.

The spine crunched, and the wolf's hind-quarters sagged. Still he snarled, but the gory dog danced out of reach and then leaped clear over his head. The wolf strove with a desperate endeavor of the forelegs to drag himself about. But the fight was over.

The son of Tlahkit shook the limp brute's ninety pounds as a terrier might worry a rat. Then he stepped over the carcass and advanced to where the female wolf greeted

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him with the white-tusked grin and licked the victor's wounds.

His shoulders had healed before he returned to Kechumstuk. And Travenell was glad. He needed those shoulders. For Joe and Fox and Kooneek had failed of the task assigned them. Kooneek indeed had drowned before their eyes, when the weighted canvas bucket responded to the impetuous thrust of the amber waters of the river.

It had been Travenell's idea. And over the evening meal he told it to Pierre.

"That water races for fifty miles through various formations of rotten quartz," he said. "By the time it has bumped a fragment of quartz through the boulders of the upper rapids, the gold is milled free. That's why we get the fine black sand and color in the backlash. But just below the salmon falls, the water really slows up for the first time. And the heavy stuff—the worthwhile nuggets—must sink, in that trout pocket in mid-stream. It's been going on for ages. It's too deep for anything but some kind of a dredging apparatus. But we can rig up one."

With many experiments and much painstaking care they rigged their dredge. It was a heavy canvas sack, held open with an iron ring, and ballasted with rock. They skeleton-rigged a rope to a big birch. Then Pierre guided its upward progress, from the opposite bank, after Travenell had dropped it from the canoe.

The dogs' function was to pull with might and main, up the hill. But the foam-crested fury of the stream distended the canvas bag like a parachute and pulled Joe and Fox and Kooneek in.

Mex and Yaheet Charlie developed an acute hysteria upon feeling the first tug of the water-laden bag. Here was indeed bad medicine. For years they had known the inanimate resistance of the load. But to have it assume the initiative, and hurry them inexorably toward the roaring waves of racing Kechumstuk, was too much for husky nature.

They yelped and tangled, and betrayed preference for the lash and the security of the shore. Travenell and Pierre were in despair. Then Silver King bounded joyously into camp and was greeted with acclaim. The experiment was on again! They fitted the moosehide collar upon him and led him down to the shore of Kechumstuk.

Pierre on the farther bank, took a half-hitch of the rope around a cedar, for security's sake, and Travenell worked the nose of the canoe up into the whirlpool. Silver King, shoulder deep in the amber flood, watched him. Foam gathered at his throat, like a bone in the teeth of a square-rigger. He lapped the water occasionally and eyed Travenell. The young Englishman hurled the weighted sack into the black whirlpool, and shouted—

"Now Silver King, old boy, mush!"

In twelve feet of foam-crested water, the canvas bag bellied and tugged at the sodden hemp. Kechumstuk hurled its fury against it, and it yanked savagely at the moosehide collar.

Before the son of Tlahkit could set himself for a pull, he was jerked off his feet. The roaring water of Kechumstuk sang again in his ears and stung in his throat, as it had on that distant day of the quest of the white ptarmigan. His straining feet strove vainly for purchase in the muck of the back-current, and the rock-freighted sack backed stubbornly down-stream.

Above the roar in his ears, he seemed to hear dim and distantly the encouraging roar of Travenell—

"Go it, Silver King!"

He threw himself into the moosehide collar with desperate fury. His long sharp claws caught in a fissure of rock. A moment more and his head was above the amber current. He saw the sun, the gold and green wall of evergreens, and Travenell waving encouragement.

"Mush, you wolf devil," he pleaded. And Silver King mushed.

He hurled his hundred and fifty pounds of bone and sinew into the moosehide collar. He squatted low, like a draft-horse, and searched with straining, tense paws for the granite ridges in the faulted rock stratum of Kechumstuk.

Inch by inch he battled shoreward, and inch by inch the weighted canvas sack won back the ground the raging current had gained. The taut line between the wolf-dog and Pierre grew straighter. Fighting a thousand pounds of back pressure, the steel-ringed maw of the improvised dredge crept along the bottom of the placer whirlpool.

Then at a sharp command from Travenell Pierre paid out the line. The blaze-faced slayer of wolves, his tendons strained to

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cracking, and his teeth bared in the grimness of his exhausting struggle, fought his way shoreward. As the weighted sack drew into shallower water, a part of the tension was relieved.

The son of Tlahkit gathered himself for a final effort, and in a series of short bounds, placed the great sack on the needle-carpeted bank of Kechumstuk.

Travenell had forgotten about the canvas sack. He knelt in front of the exhausted wolf-dog and hugged him, with muttered curses and profane endearments.

"You old white-faced devil," he said unsteadily, "you old draft-horse, you!"

It was Pierre who made the discovery. His shout startled even Silver King. He came rushing toward Travenell, incoherent with excitement. In his hands was a great nugget of red gold. The canvas sack was one-fourth full of it. Great battered globes of it, like new-churned butter, obscured the rock ballast. The whirlpool of Kechumstuk was about to relinquish its accretions of slow centuries.

Four times that day, Silver King fought the raging flood of the furious rapids, and four times the canvas sack with its great steel-circled mouth agape, crept out upon the pine needles, vomiting amber water, and bloated with butter-balls of current-churned gold nuggets. Pierre shouted and danced and wept, and Travenell hugged Silver King and pounded his white chest with his fists, and called him a "wise, old, rabbit-gorged beggar."

From morning until night they toiled with that inefficient bone-racking apparatus. The son of Tlahkit grew thin and red-eyed and mangy from the long hours of immersion. But the gold lust burned in the veins of the Englishman and the Cree half-breed, until they toiled from sunup till dusk.

After a week, the spoil of the weighted canvas dredge began to lessen, and in a month the treasure of the placer whirlpool of Kechumstuk, that did not repose in buckskin sacks in the cabin, had been jolted loose from a century's rest, to seek lodgment in other fissures further down the racing current's rock-ribbed bed.

Their appearance in Fairbanks started a wild and fruitless stampede to the looted waters of Kechumstuk. And there Travenell signified that he intended going out.

"There's a girl, you know," he explained with the awkward boyish smile that had made the girl promise to wait, and with the slow flush mounting beneath the tanned cheeks to the candid blue eyes. "I've money enough now to settle down. It'll be Paris, I think. She wants to continue her music and—and I—well I've daubed a little, and I'd like to see if some real instruction wouldn't help me to do it better."

Pierre and Silver King accompanied him as far as Seward. And on the long wooden pier, where hurrying chechakos and noisy tourists and phlegmatic sourdoughs stopped to stare with avid wonderment, Travenell knelt beside Silver King and hugged him with tears streaming down his face, and pounded his broad white chest with his fists, and cursed him wistfully, and called him a "malamute-killing, rabbit-gorged old wolf beggar."

"We're coming back this way on our wedding trip, old man," he whispered, into the upright ears, "and you'll like the little girl, just as she'll love you. You've helped to earn that little place in France and, old dog, you'll share it!"

Then the "give way" whistle blared forth briefly, and the water beneath the stern of the old *Kadiak King* grew agitated and creamy. Travenell dashed across the creaking gangway and hurried up and aft. They stood on the dock watching him, those two—Pierre too stolid to wave, and Silver King, with the proud repression of the blood that was of Tlahkit, killer of men, too dignified to bark or howl.

They were there, he knew, until the gray of the sea and the graphite of the cliffs blended and were both strangely blurred in his smarting eyes. A voice broke in upon his meditations.

"Grub's bum," it said. "We should ha' grabbed the ship *Iroquois*. That outfit feed's prime!"

THE trim alert little lieutenant permitted his eyes to roam over a score or more of snapping, snarling malamutes, mutually strange and inherently suspicious.

"That gray," he said, nodding to one who held himself proudly aloof, "he is magnificent, superb! And he goes?"

Pierre drew patterns in the snow with the toe of his beaded Cree moccasin. He interpreted the French officer's admiration in terms of cash. He need money. The

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yellow-haired girl in the Midas dance-hall had departed with his share of Kechumstuk's gold. One must drink much to forget such things. He stared at the purchasing agent of France, and then at Silver King.

"How much he fetch?" he asked.

"Three hundred," said Lieutenant Matraillet.

He lit a cigaret and puffed at it, watching the half-breed covertly. Then he snapped his watch open.

"We must hurry," he declared.

Travenell had not returned with his bride, to claim the dog. Two years had passed. The proceeds from the sale of the team would stake him for another try on Kechumstuk.

"All right," he said, and stopped to pat the huge husky's head. "He ees one —— fine dog!"

Silver King became one of forty huskies, penned forward in the great chicken-wire netting, rigged in the bow of the *Polar Chief*. The strange heaving of the deck beneath him made him sick and weak, but he slashed savagely the unwary brutes that shouldered or jostled him, and squatted down in the extreme bow, his size and truculence creating an invisible barrier between him and the lesser creatures of his kind.

Karluk and Mex and Comanche sidled up to him for protection from the others, and, through some loyalty born of the fact that they had slaved in the same traces, Silver King would rear his ruffled and stiff-legged bulk between them and the strange aggressor. That usually was sufficient to break up the threatened hostilities.

But once a big black mongrel pursued Mex right up to the jaw of the white-breasted terror. Silver King had gained his sea legs, and with them a measure of his old aggressive arrogance. He leaped upon the startled black, smothering him down upon the steel plates and slashing him until he yelped with pain. Then he shook him by the scruff of the neck like a rat and carried him over and dropped him in front of the big arc of watching canines.

The cool insolence goaded the others to fury. The tawny hair bristled upon the shoulders of a Great Dane, and he advanced from the arc. A white Kreguyin trailer and a steel-gray Kuskowim leader followed suit. With stiff-legged stride, bristling backs and tense quivering nostrils, they strode forward until they paused nose to nose with the son of Tlahkit.

The great grizzled ruff on his shoulders stiffened, and the long lean muzzle shot low and forward. The other members of the old Kechumstuk team rallied behind Silver King. The arc readjusted itself behind the belligerents, with much shifting and changing of positions. It was smaller now and closer about the dauntless three who had called the bluff of the son of the white wolf.

The chorus of snarls grew into a vibrant volume, like the bass notes of a hundred cellos. The white Kreguyin husky snarled shrilly, with a narrowing of his slant eyes and a writhing of his lean lips. Others roared their rage in varied keys, but lower, deeper and more viciously resonant than all the others, rose the guttural growl of Silver King.

Then the Kuskowim leader leaped. Silver King tore away the side of his face and then lunged in to break the forelegs of the yellow Dane. Karluk hurled himself bravely upon the Kreguyin trailer, and a small brown cur attacked Comanche in desperate rough and tumble.

In a moment the roar of battle had aroused the passengers and crew. They crowded with white, awed faces outside the great netting, and an officer played a searchlight upon the dogs from the bridge.

It was a wonderful spectacle. Forty dogs were piled in a snapping roaring pyramid. Snarls and the thudding of bodies on the steel plates and the clicking of white tusks blended in a noise indescribable.

Anon the pile would erupt bodies like chaff, and from the center would rear the gory crest of Silver King, fighting his battle silently. His great white teeth, a heritage from generations of moose-slaying ancestors, sought out the flabby fold of skin over the jugular, or darted in unerringly at the vulnerable points in exposed legs and spines. His great forepaws thrust off assailants like the parry of an expert boxer, and the long black claws of his hind feet, slit through husky hides like knives.

Lieutenant Matraillet, appalled at the threatened self-destruction of his pack, led the peacemakers, armed with whips and clubs. They were an hour restoring complete order. The plates were slippery with blood, and the roaring headwind blew tufts

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of coarse hair over the garments of the awed and frightened passengers.

Mex and Karluk and six strange dogs were dead. Among them were the yellow Dane, the white barbarian from distant Kreguyin and the morose Kuskowim trailer. The Dane, with his broken legs, had been literally trampled and clawed to a pulp.

Lieutenant Matraillet almost wept over the havoc wrought in legs and spines. Eight legs were set in splints, and three dogs with broken spines were shot. Twenty-eight dogs remained after that all-night inventory. Five were more or less disabled. Silver King, a mass of jagged wounds, was given quarters by himself, away aft.

A tall white-haired mining king mopped his face with his handkerchief and turned to the person beside him.

"It was splendid!" he declared in a hushed voice. "We'll never live to see the equal of that white-faced fellow. There never was one like him walked the earth!"

The person addressed chanced to be a slender hazel-eyed girl. There were tears in the wide eyes, and her breath came in short gasps.

"It was terrible," she said. "Terrible and magnificent. That white-faced dog is the Wilderness incarnate!"

"He is superb!" said the little lieutenant, bowing low as he passed. "He could eat, I believe, a dozen Boches at a sitting." His smile lifted the points of his tiny waxed mustache and revealed his even teeth.

"Boches, did you say?" queried the girl, a gleam of mischief in her fine eyes. "I like that! My name is Schneider! But I'll keep away from him. He looks intelligent enough to guess it."

SILVER KING'S wounds were not yet healed when they forsook the ship for the even more terrifying express coaches. It was almost a relief to be again on the heaving decks of a ship, after seven days in the swaying roaring grinding gloom of the special car.

The dogs were weak and listless and red-eyed now. Silver King was quartered with the rest. They were robbed of the overflow of animal spirit that makes for truculence.

Then came the day when the vibrating beneath their feet ceased, to be succeeded by a strange silence that set them to stirring uneasily. Doors opened, strange voices shouted, and a tremendous bustle set up all about them.

Lieutenant Matraillet proudly led his charges out into the warm slanting sunshine of France. People clustered about them, commenting on their size, their weakness, and the peculiarities of the slanting eyes and pointed ears. A gamin pointed at Silver King.

"A wolf," he said.

Lieutenant Matraillet smiled superciliously.

"A wolf!" he said scornfully. "*Nom de Dieu!* Beside him, the wolf is a kitten!"

Silver King lifted his nose and sniffed the hazy warm air. He stretched himself and walked sedately down the long pier to where jolting conveyances waited. He was used to these swaying jolting cabins, now. Only this one hummed more and jolted less than the others. And it was a ride of hours, rather than days. When again they opened the door, there was less noise and confusion. About him was the orderly quiet of a French military camp.

All about them rose the pine-clad hills of the Vosges. Their crests shone bright in the sunlight, against the clear blue of the cloudless skies. The aroma of the evergreens came to the huskies' nostrils, and they lifted inquiring noses, sniffing the welcome fragrance. It was good to be again on solid ground, with the forest smells in one's nostrils.

Silver King peered through the chicken-wire fencing toward the north. He was acutely homesick. He longed for the brawling white water of Kechumstuk, for the stillness of the Tanana Hills, where he had slain the wolf and wooed the female, for the crisp, cold, still air, with the wolf-howl quivering through it from the great cedar swamps behind Travenell's cabin.

He placed a great paw against the fencing and shook it gently. It yielded a little, but sprang back when his paw was removed.

About long columns of men went tramping, and strange snorting wagons pursued ill-smelling paths between long rows of tents. Horses puffed and grunted, men cursed, saying words like those of Pierre, and strange, bearded faces peered through at him. They poked bits of biscuit through, which he disdained, and later pieces of raw beef, which he gulped eagerly.

After two or three days men came with little wagons, and new, hard, shiny harness,

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unlike the soft and battered moosehide of the days of yore. The little lieutenant was with them, and he read statistics pompously from a little red book.

They harnessed Silver King alone, despite his snarls, and the lieutenant shouted to him to "Mush!" When he pulled seven hundred and fifty pounds alone, the bearded men jumped and cheered. Day after day the dogs worked with the little wagons. They were hitched in pairs, in threes, and in great teams of ten and twelve. Lieutenant Matraillet read from the little red book, and the others acted accordingly.

One day they brought a machine-gun into the parade grounds and fired one shot. Some of the dogs leaped affrightedly, but most of them were used to the sound of firearms. Silver King turned his head indolently. Travenell was fond of shooting.

But when, on a wagon behind them, the machine gun screamed and sputtered for full thirty seconds, panic reigned. Koonyah bolted, tangling the son of Tlahkit, who forthwith turned and chastised him soundly.

The men laughed. But in a week's time the roar and sputter of the gun, from any quarter, occasioned no notice at all, save a languid sniffing of the acrid fumes.

Two months later, when the chill winds screeched through the snow-choked passes, and the night sky had something of the faint flare of Silver King's own North, the "dog artillery" paraded in review before the general.

Ten teams there were, each of three dogs, each hauling on a toboggan-like sleigh, a machine gun weighing three hundred and ten pounds, and ammunition bringing the total weight just over one thousand pounds.

Silver King led his trio, with Lieutenant Matraillet himself in command. They went north, over pine-clad ridges, and east along the banks of a little river. Then they crossed on the ice and headed north again. Silver King's old spirit shone in his oblique eyes. The wind burned in his lungs, and the snow crackled crisply underfoot as on the old treks into Rampart and Valdez. It was heavy going for three dogs, and they strained with crouching bodies and cracking tendons.

New scents came to Silver King's nostrils, as they attained the crest of a ridge. There was a tremor in the air too, and he could feel, rather than hear, distant noises. The wind was from the north, and strange smells were upon it. There was the acrid smell of smoke, as when the machine gun screeched. And other smells. The ruff upon his neck stirred gently. It was the smell of the kill!

Yet it was not like the musk smell of the blood of the cock partridge by Kechumstuk, or even of the cow moose he had pulled down on the Porcupine. It was other blood. It stirred in the long-lived dog memory. A chechako had said something outside the Midas bar in Valdez, and guns had cracked and the chechako lay still in the snow. Travenell had helped to pick him up, and behind Travenell loitered the son of Tlahkit. That was the smell!

They went on, and the sounds grew louder, and the scents stronger. Great plumes of smoke drifted lazily up from the pine tops, in the valley outspread before them. Overhead burst other smoke plumes, with a sudden splitting burst of noise that brought the startled huskies up on their haunches in blind bewilderment. Down below, pigmy forms could be seen, standing in long narrow gashes across the face of the valley, or straggling in irregular lines across to other gashes a few hundred yards away.

Over all smoke plumes were rising, and a steady trembling boom carried to the sensitive ears of Silver King. With a whoop from the tall driver, they swung down-hill, careering along at full speed, the blue steel of the gun glinting in the Winter sunlight.

Men passed, carrying others, from which, rank and strong, came the musky smell that burned into Silver King's nostrils and memory as the odor of the kill. The smell was that of the chechako who had fallen and lain still in the crisp crackling snow in front of the Midas bar at Valdez.

Shrieks arose around them, and men lay still upon the snow or writhed in bloody pools, with cries that made the grizzled hair on Silver King's great shoulders ripple and stiffen.

They turned east again, and the sounds of battle grew faint and distant. Overhead, great buzzing things sailed in curves, zigzagging now and then, with smoke plumes bursting on all sides of them. They were bigger and made a noise different from that of any flying creature Silver King had seen.

That night, in an evergreen thicket so

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dense and silent as to suggest the cabin by Kechumstuk, they rested. The next morning they were again in an area of smoke plumes and noise. They halted behind a covert of stunted trees, and the machine gun on the sleigh roared and screeched for a long time.

The dogs rested. Then, in a bursting blinding flash, a smoke plume burst over them. Showers of snow rose in the air, and Koonyah jumped and yelped.

Lieutenant Matraillet was lying prone, now, and writhing, with the smell upon him that was upon the checkako in Valdez. Spurts of snow flew up about them, and the driver called sharply to them to mush. Silver King threw his eager weight into the stiff, oil-smelling harness, and they were off through the pine of the ridge.

The load was very heavy. They were dragging Koonyah, who hung in the collar, with set, bulging eyes. The lieutenant had been left behind.

Other smoke plumes burst deafeningly all about and trees splintered. Silver King's grizzled hair rose on his back, and he snarled, the old, resonant defiant challenge. But it was to hide his fear, as it had been when he snarled at the starving wolf-pack from the circle of light outside the cabin window, on the frozen banks of Kechumstuk.

Across a clear place, men in spiked helmets came running, and the driver and the machine-gun operator threw themselves prone, and the machine-gun roared again, kicking up spurts of snow at the feet of the oncoming men. Several of them crumpled up, and the freshening wind brought the heavy smell of the kill. Others fell, and the remaining men went back to a great scar on the face of the opposite hill.

That night a great yellow finger poked its way through the steel-blue sky of the north. It was still and cold up in the pine ridges of the Vosges, and the rumbling noise had ceased. The yellow finger was like the great glittering and dancing red and green aurora, and the old homesickness stirred in the heart of the son of Tlahkit.

He lifted his muzzle to the yellow flare in the northern sky, and, with Koonyah stiff in death beside him, he let his great white throat vibrate in the eery quavering wail of the ages. It rose and fell and traveled in the still air for miles, until many a superstitious Celt and Boche stirred uneasily and hoped that the strange wail might not mean that *he* was next.

Silver King had forgotten the stiff harness, and the smoke plumes and the screeching gun. He was back, it seemed, in the silent ridges of the Tanana, lifting his voice in arrogant challenge to the thin distant wail of the hunting wolf-pack in the swamps of Yellow Bear. He was back where the real aurora hissed and purred and crackled in its thousand-mile sweep over the frozen lakes and rivers and forests.

The driver cursed him and told him to be still, but Silver King was not listening. The cold and the scent of the pine and that strange yellow finger, beckoning out of the North, had wrought a spell upon his heart.

THE next morning a lean slinking native dog was added to the team, and Koonyah was left stark and sprawling in the shadow of the scrub pine. The sunlight filtered through into the little glade, and Silver King, pausing to rest, saw the tiny parallel tracks of a field mouse. He thrust his lean muzzle into the snow, and his blood raced with the old familiar scent.

He would have liked to dig it out, all aquiver, squeaking and blinking its bulging beady eyes, before he snapped it up as a mouthful. How often he had dug them out on the banks of Kechumstuk, just to hear them squeak!

Then the tall driver and a new lieutenant came, and shouted "Mush!" and he and the others threw their shoulders into the creaking leather.

Days followed in which the machine gun on the low sleigh screeched and chattered for many minutes at a time. The snow on distant ridges would rise in clouds, like processions of white phantoms, and dancing black specks against the dazzling background would drop and writhe and lay still.

From great brown scars on the other hills would come the distant chatter of the reply, and all about Silver King tiny objects would strike the earth, scattering snow crystals in the sunlight like diamonds, or spattering against the black bark of the scrub pine. He had ceased to snap at them, and no longer quivered with terror of the great purring things that stretched long wings overhead and zigzagged against the blue sky when the smoke plumes burst about them.

Often long lines of gray-clad men with

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rifles would creep through the underbrush where shrapnel and ball tore the scarred trunks of the trees. The dogs would lie prone in the evergreens, and the machine gun would screech and clatter, casting forth a shower of glinting brass shells that lay about Silver King, emitting faint wisps of acrid smoke.

After that the guns would be silent, and the long lines would leap forth and race across the shell-pits in the snow toward the gash in the whiteness on the other hills. Many crumpled up, and others crawled back on their hands and knees. And over the noise of the artillery, would rise shrieks and prayers and curses, in a tongue like Pierre's, high and strident, when the traces tangled on the Kechumstuk trail

Silence would come with the darkness, and the flaring light-fingers and dazzling rockets would play against the black curtain of the northern sky; and the son of Tlahkit, with the smell of the blood of the kill upon the chill wind whispering in the mourning pines, would lift his lean muzzle to the north star and howl his homesickness for the things that were.

ABOVE the roar of the Gnome motor, the dapper French gunner shrieked "Allons" and pointed dramatically below. Through a tiny opening between the struts and fuselage, the English pilot saw the zigzag gashes of the German second line. They were manifestly far enough over, and the binoculars of the French lieutenant had ceased to sweep the enemy's trenches. Even as he glanced below, the keen-featured, blue-eyed Englishman brought the monoplane about. He was none too soon.

Below them a shell from some eager aerial gun burst with a clatter like the smashing of Haviland china. Little crooked streaks of blue smoke spread against the gray of the sky, and a fragment or two ripped the aluminum plates of the left wing.

The gunner depressed the blunt muzzle of the aeroplane gun, and it spat blue-fumed falsetto defiance at the pigmies thousands of feet beneath. Then he pulled a lever, and a blunt-nosed dart-bomb dropped and burst with a faint boom. Eight hundred cigar-shaped missiles started their fan-shaped descent upon the Boches beneath.

The little monoplane bounded abruptly upward and began its crazily erratic homeward flight. A second shell burst in front of them, and then a third and fourth. The dapper lieutenant crumpled and hung over the side of the tiny car, giving it an alarming list. The pilot threw over an aileron control and righted it. Then, blindingly imminent, another shrapnel spewing shell burst with a crackling shriek.

The pilot sagged forward as the Gnome motor choked and ceased to hurl the splintered propellor in the purring blurred circle. Then the machine dropped, turning over and over like a winged mallard.

The blue-eyed English bird-man straightened and caught at the controls with hands that bled through the heavy gloves. The machine looped twice and then pulled out of its blind descent and volplaned southward.

The French trenches loomed like a long black ribbon against the distant hills. If he could only make it! But a monoplane's angle of descent is steep, and two necessary banks, when the crippled machine forsook its rudder control, made it steeper. It drooped with one bent and trailing wing, like a dying plover, and buried its shattered nose in a "no man's knob" between the lines.

The sunset was red in the west, and it illumined the wings of the capsized plane until they seemed drenched in blood. The gunner had fallen out long since, to sprawl grotesquely through the air, into the torn earth of the artillery-ravaged German lines.

The English aviator pitched from the bent and twisted fuselage and lay prone upon his face, strangely inert. The sun drenched his queer leather armor and helmet with crimson light.

For a long time he lay there, with the blood dripping from beneath the rent helmet and seeping from the jagged holes in the heavy gloves. Then he stirred and sat up in the powdery snow, with comprehension bringing light into the keen blue eyes.

"Leroux!" he called. Then in a lower voice. "Poor devil! I remember now. That "duster" got him. They were lucky, —— 'em!"

He crawled around to the dejectedly drooping elevation planes and stared with wrinkled brows at the German lines. He knew that they were coming. They were about due, too. The Vallaine sector had been quiet, entirely too quiet, for a week or more. And they had noted strange activities over on the other ridge. Hence the

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frenzied eagerness of the Boches that they should not return.

"We had every gun within three miles on us," he thought. "And we gave them a fancy chase at that."

But the thought carried little consolation. He wanted to tell General Veignier certain things. And the snow was already scattering in tiny puffs about them. A machine gun raked the knoll, spattering against the twisted, aluminum-sheathed wings of the wrecked plane.

He cowered behind a hillock and watched the play of the bullets in the frozen earth. At least they had not seen him. They weren't certain that he wasn't dead. But they were preparing to make sure.

And from the distant fringe of evergreen the French had vouchsafed no sign that they knew he was there. He hadn't seen another plane in an hour. They were all in but his. And in the hour of sunset, when they knew that the "eyes of air" quit operations by a sort of tacit agreement, the Boches had prepared their coup.

He anxiously scanned the shrapnel-shredded forest. Overhead, shells coursed in mighty arcs, hissing, whistling or shrieking according to caliber and trajectory. Some of them trailed faint wisps of smoke after them, and others left no trace but an ominous trail of quick-dying friction sparks.

Smoke plumes rose against the dull green of the forest ridge and floated off across the little valley. The wounded man didn't fear the heavy guns. They were after bigger game. But the sharpshooters and machine gun operators delighted in peppering the valley. It relieved the tension and kept the space clear of wire cutters.

Directly opposite him, within the Boches' lines, the rattle of small arms died out. He knew what that signified. It was the first advance. And he was in their path. Oh for a signal rocket, or even a Coston torch!

Then he saw them—three dogs and two men with a long lean sleigh upon which was a shrouded something. They emerged from the fringe of evergreens and dashed boldly out across the valley. They too had seen him. God bless 'em! They had guessed the Boches' game. They were going to help hold that knoll. And they had signal rockets, he was sure of that. Two red and three green balls, there against the steel-gray north sky, would do it!

On they came, that little succoring cavalcade. The airman, prone behind the upended plane, cheered them under his breath. It was thrilling. It was like the finish of those old-time five-hundred-mile dog races for the government mail contract.

THE Germans had seen them. They could hardly have failed to. The five moving specks were limned starkly against the shimmering red of the sunset. A lull seemed to descend upon the little theater of shrieking death. Then it burst forth in renewed fury.

Puffs of snow leaped up around the little group. Shrapnel burst overhead. A machine gun swept back and forth in front of them.

They were almost half-way there. Another hundred yards and the swell of the knoll would protect them.

Then the driver pitched forward upon his face. On they came, loping, with the machine-gun operator galloping behind them in futile effort to keep up. More snow spattered, and he too crumpled. A dog leaped straight up in the air, and yelped. The second one turned and bit at his haunches, quivered and lay with legs pointed up to the sky. The big leader lay down quietly. It was over.

The man on the tiny knoll sobbed a curse. And they had nearly won! Another sortie had begun. The Boches had left a hundred yards of trench and swept on, cheering. They too were interested in the knoll. Well, it was all over. The blue-eyed English pilot closed his eyes wearily.

He stared beyond the sheltering wing of the plane, and then back at that pitiful little cavalcade. The sun shone strongly upon the stiff, motionless specks in the snow. Then its slanting rays came into full play upon the lead dog's crouching figure. The bird-man made a queer noise in his throat.

"My God, it can't be!" he exclaimed. And then:

"By Heaven, it must. There never was another like him!"

He turned to the great dog with the white face and breast. He seemed still alive.

"Come on, Silver King," he shouted. "Come on you rabbit-gorged old devil!"

The crouching dog turned, his pointed ears alert. He was on his feet in a bound, his crisply curled tail twitching. Here was a voice from distant Kechumstuk.

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"Come on!" it entreated in the old familiar accents. "Mush, you white-faced beggar!"

And with a single, short, glad yelp, the son of Tlahkit mushed.

He hurled one hundred and fifty pounds of quivering eagerness into the harness that strained and creaked. It set the two dead dogs to convulsive, stiff-legged movement. But the load didn't yield. Two hundred pounds of inert dog-flesh was backed by a thousand pounds of load. Ahead, on the little knoll, the familiar voice of Travenell of Kechumstuk entreated, with a break in it—

"Try again, Silver King, you —— malamute-feedin' wolf," it said. "Come on, you old beggar!"

From the broad white chest straining against the collar, and with every wire-taut tendon cracking, the son of the White Wolf mushed. He dug his black claws into the shrapnel-torn clods, and the sleigh yielded. The dogs dragged with lolling heads and rigid limbs, but by inches the load came on. Silver King bucked his burden in a series of short leaps, and, when he had acquired the necessary momentum, settled into a straining stride that brought his belly almost to the ground.

From the French trenches rose cheers, and from the opposite side the thud of many feet upon the frozen snow. Prone beside the machine, with blood seeping from his torn helmet and dripping from his lacerated hands and broken leg, Travenell talked lovingly to the oncoming dog.

Snow spattered up in front of the broad chest, and the machine gun's frenzied screech lifted in sinister falsetto above the sound of cheers. The son of Tlahkit faltered and fell.

"Buck it, Silver King," pleaded Travenell. "Eat it, you old blaze-faced devil!"

The great dog was again on his feet, thrusting his torn crimson chest into the collar. With lolling heads and stiff legs, with screeching runners and clicking cartridge tapes, the load came on. It was within a hundred feet of the wrecked monoplane. And the Germans had less than a quarter of a mile to go!

"Speed up, you salmon thief!" pleaded Travenell. "Show 'em your fangs are red, old beggar. Give 'em the shoulder-rush! Come on, you Silver King!"

Behind him the French infantry had broken cover and was sweeping forward in a long, lean line. They didn't need those Coston rockets, after all! Veignier, wise old fox, couldn't be fooled.

The son of Tlahkit whimpered and hurled his bleeding shoulders into the harness in short eager leaps. Each more frenzied than its predecessor, they brought the sleigh rapidly on. He had forgotten the dead dogs and the clicking cartridge tapes. He was back on Kechumstuk again, with the amber water roaring in his ears, and the submerged steel-jawed dredge questing in the Devil's Placer for heavy red gold, Pierre was paying out line, Travenell was encouraging from the needle-covered bank, and he was nearing the shore.

The son of Tlahkit was on the run. He thrust his eager gory muzzle into Travenell's tear-wet face, bunching his legs wolf fashion. The momentum of the sleigh carried it up on the dead dogs.

The blue-eyed Englishman tore at the cartridge cases. Then the mounted gun swept in a short arc, and from its blunt muzzle went forth with angry blue flame, the hissing hornets of death.

The charging Boches crumpled before its steel-tipped scorn, and lay in the gathering dusk, stiff and silent. The long line wavered and melted and resolved itself into grotesque sprawling figures that curled up in the snow and came no farther.

There was a thudding of many feet and the noise of cheering as the triumphant French swept by them.

But Travenell didn't heed. He was crying, it seemed, and hugging a sodden, gory dog, whose great green eyes had begun to glaze. He was beating the sticky crimson chest with his shattered fists, and calling Silver King a "—— old rabbit-gorged, white-faced devil!"

But the son of Tlahkit the Truculent didn't heed. The silver-pelted slayer of moose and men was back again with his truculent sire, ranging the still Tanana hills where the snow lay like sprinkled blue diamond dust, beneath the hissing, purring play of the aurora. He was back with the smiling mother of white-faced pups, in the sun-spangled trail by the Porcupine. He was crouching beneath the cabin of Kechumstuk, lifting his lean muzzle to the steel-tinted skies, singing the quavering song of the kill.

Silver King was with his fathers.

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THE CAMP-FIRE

A MEETING-PLACE FOR READERS, WRITERS AND ADVENTURERS

ARTHUR JAMES HAYES rises, by our custom, to introduce himself. As you will see, he has been a bit out of communication.

Chisholm, Minnesota.

Your forwarded letter was received in the Pelican Lake country several days ago. The half-breed trapper who obligingly brought it in from Orr was not returning, so I was unable to get my reply out more promptly. I have been on the trail of the vanishing lumberjack for the past week, endeavoring to tone up my local color for a series of stories. The old two-fisted, red-shirted calk-booted character of earlier eras has disappeared. The old tote-trails are grown in with grass, and the tar-paper flaps, a forlorn specter, on the ridge-pole of the camps that were. To-day they build with milled lumber, import "Jacks" who pack their belongings in straw suit-cases, and who have attained the effeteness of unions, labor agitation, and organized strikes, and drag the log-laden sleighs with caterpillar tractors. But to get to the autobiography:

WAS born in Duluth, Minnesota, in the early nineties. My earliest recollections are of that strip of strangely wild territory between the Mesaba Range and the Rainey River. Knew it when the Indians killed swimming moose with axes from canoes and shot whitefish endeavoring to leap Kettle Falls. Have vague recollections of the high and ebb tide of the Seine River gold-rush, an aftermath of the Klondyke Frenzy, when thousands of gold-seekers poured into Mine Center in quest of an Ontario El Dorado. They poured out again, disgusted and disillusioned. The stamp-mills and shafts, long since abandoned, are among the show places of the Rainey.

It has been my lot, hitherto, to live rather on the fringe of things. Saw the only gold brick the Foley Mine ever turned out, and the troops that poured in after the Nett Lake fiasco in '99. Have ridden eight miles about one jump ahead of a forest fire, and witnessed the burning of Chisholm, in 1908, in the State's greatest conflagration. Knew most intimately, perhaps, all phases of the Minnesota lumberjack existence. Have seen him in his heyday and decline. There are some corking good tales in the old mackinawed Vikings of the pine country.

HAVEN'T adventured myself, but have been rarely fortunate in meeting in the out-of-the-way places many a man who had. Got the idea for "Loot of the Aztec Chief" from the mate of a Scotch tramp in Port Arthur, Ontario, and several of the incidents from a stranded salt-water man I met on the Detroit water-front. The rest is liberally leavened with imagination. Have done cub-reporting, attended college, and instructed sundry classes in rhetoric. I like the lonesome trails and the men from the far horizon. Will annex an LL. B. in June, but aspire rather to journalism and fiction. The family have pioneered from my birth and have seen the older, wilder days of the Iron Ranges. Regret that I can not qualify with Camp-Fire's first-hand performers. Hope to break in later with something actually worth while.

WORD comes to me indirectly from one of us, Albert Kinross, whose stories our older readers will remember, an Englishman formerly "somewhere in France" but at the time of his letter serving with the Salonika forces. I hadn't known he had been wounded but am very glad he came through in good shape:

Please give Mr. Hoffman my very best regards and tell him that I am still alive and kicking, in spite of one bad knock in 1915 which nearly finished me but which seems to have left no souvenirs behind it.

A GOOD suggestion from our comrade, E. E. Harriman, of Los Angeles:

I have a suggestion to make to every man who reads *Adventure*. It seems to me that it is a good one and I want to know how it looks to the rest. At least there is nothing harmful in it.

It is that the *Adventure* family make it a personal matter to give instruction to boys. Let every man who has a gun or can hire, beg or borrow one, teach at least one boy how to shoot and shoot straight. Teach the boys to be crack shots and half the problem of defense is solved, and the boy from ten to eighteen is far easier material than the older man. So let us get busy with him.

A .22 short costs little and the boy or man who learns to drop 'em right with it can master the larger gun in one-two order. A bit of instruction in the care and handling of guns will lessen the danger of accidents in later life. My personal belief is that every man, woman and child should learn to handle guns right. It did not make my daughter any less womanly or attractive to know how to shoot straight. When Little Crow and his band of murderers ranged through our part of Minnesota, the men were very glad to know that

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my mother could handle a rifle and was willing to stand guard. They knew she would not go to sleep at her post.

So let us all, if it seems good to you, take it upon ourselves to educate the boys. Some men will find it easy, and highly remunerative in fun and increased health, if they will take on a class of half a dozen boys for a regular Saturday afternoon chase through the woods with the little rifle.

A WORD from Edgar Young on his story in this issue:

This long-haired Jane is a composite picture of three women I have known. They are as follows:

1. A woman who followed the construction of the S. P. de Mexico in the capacity of a free-lance prostitute from Guaymas to the Tepic River. A gambler named Peters once called her "the long-haired Jane" and the name stuck. Any one who worked on the construction of that road will remember her.

2. A girl named —— ——, a Tex-Mex, who was an inmate of a dance-hall in El Paso. A friend I was traveling with at the time, who is now working for the Western Union in New York, just about went crazy over her. He always contended she was a virtuous girl, that he knew a man that offered her a large sum of money. I have always been inclined to take his ravings with a grain of salt, but I have tried to use this material in the story.

3. A girl named Pastora, a peon girl of Mazatlan where I worked as private telegraph operator for S. L. Wakulewicz, Chief Construction Engineer, when they were building the S. P. extension toward Guadalajara. This Pastora was the daughter of a woman who lived with an American we jokingly called Six-Shooter-Bill Somebody-or-other, on account of his being such a coward. This girl, Pastora, followed our chief clerk to Acaponeta when we moved down there with the general office. And when he refused to have anything to do with her she poured kerosene oil on her clothing and burned herself up one night.

HE SAYS he has not risen to introduce himself to us before because he had been puzzled to think of anything about himself that would be of any special interest. Personally I think his stories show that Russell A. Boggs knows a number of things that are of interest to us. And in any case our Camp-Fire custom of having writers introduce themselves when they join us with a story has for its main object merely better acquaintance and good-fellowship among us. There's nothing in this thing of regarding authors and editors as different from readers. We're all just humans and pretty much alike. The Camp-Fire belongs to all of us; it was started years ago, so that all of us could come together once a month, hunch up in a big circle around the fire, swap yarns, ask questions, help one another when we could and—well, just act human and have as good a time as possible.

And, with our greetings to him, here's Mr. Boggs, who is now stationed in a small town in Pennsylvania:

Ten years as a railroader will about cover the grown-up part of my life so far—ten years as agent and operator at small-town stations where duty is a thing of many complex activities and not all a happy existence of flying trains and cheery signals waved at hurrying friends. And it is because this seems so little understood that I sometimes desire to write of it, and so, perhaps, be able to show some of the real thoughts and feelings and life of the average man so placed.

Adventure Twice a Month!

I'M GLAD I can tell you that *Adventure* is going to appear twice as often, that, beginning in late Summer or early Autumn, it will be issued twice every month. I know you'll be as glad as I, for letters have been coming in from you for years urging this very step. We waited because we wanted to be sure of our ground before we moved. The last year and a half of booming circulation makes us very sure indeed. It's not "forced draft" circulation and we know it will hold.

When we made the decision we set a date well in the future so that there would be plenty of time to advise contributors in advance and plan for plenty more stories of the kind we're giving you now. By doing this we made sure that *Adventure* will be as good as ever when it appears twice as often.

INDEED, we expect it to be better. We've had to turn down many a good story in the past simply because we hadn't room for it; sometimes, because of already having stories of similar theme or setting, we've had to reject stories even better than those we had. Often we've had to miss good tales from some one of our most popular writers merely because we already had more unpublished stories from that writer than we felt warranted in carrying. With *Adventure* appearing twice a month all these things—and many more—are changed and we'll have a place for pretty nearly every good story that comes in. In short, I feel pretty blamed good about it, and I think you will too. Here's to meeting you twice as often!

By way of a P. S., the price will remain as it is.

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WE SELDOM publish stories of that type but it seemed to us that we couldn't let rules deprive our readers of a story like "Extrahazardous." I hope you'll agree with us. Its author, G. A. Wells, rises by Camp-Fire custom and introduces himself:

I was born in the State made famous by George Ade. Early in life I organized the kids of the neighborhood into a sort of *Tom Sawyer, Huck Finn, Joe Harper* gang upon whose head the community heaped abuse.

THE clicking of a telegraph-sounder had always held a certain mysterious lure for me, so eventually I took up telegraphy. In due time I became a "ham" and got a job in a Kentucky mining town where men grew up with the bark on. As a whole they were a tough lot and thought no more of knife-fighting than I would of eating a meal; but for all that they were friends when they were friends. Across the track from the depot where I worked stood a rough board shack that had been used as a meeting-place for Union miners. There had been war with strike-breakers. By the looks of the shack it must have been some war, for bullet-holes marked its surface as eyes mark a potato. Never did I go to work at night that I didn't pull all the blinds down.

Presently I was shifted to a temporary station located in a swamp farther down the road where contractors were building a new bridge across the river. The building where I had my office was a two-roomed affair, the telegraph department in one room and stores in the other. One evening a train unloaded several hundred fifty-pound boxes of dynamite in the store-room. A rifle-ball shot into one of those boxes next door could have shattered my sweet young life into a billion fragments. I moved on to more reliable scenes.

I HADN'T the slightest idea where I was going. When conductors refused to carry me I rode on the nerve that was in me, as Jack London so often said. Eventually I arrived on the border where Mr. Villa hangs out. A bunch of us who went across the line to a cock-fight one afternoon were forcibly ejected from the nation when we attempted to break up said pastime. During this time I had traveled alone. In Tucson, Arizona, I picked up a side-kicker in a Chink restaurant. Together we hit the trail for the North. After an eventful journey we landed in Kansas City. There we separated, Jack going East and I South once more.

UPON stopping to catch my breath I found myself in Arkansas. In the town where the railroad had sent me to hold down the night trick I boarded at one of the six or seven houses in the place. I wouldn't have minded so much if the chickens hadn't roosted on the foot of my bed, and I shooed them away every morning when I turned in. It was nothing unusual for a big razor-back hog to enter my room. I believe during my sojourn in Arkansas I associated with that hog more than with any other one thing. He not only tried to sleep with me but I met him at the table every meal.

FROM here to Oklahoma, then Indian Territory. The boys down that way didn't seem to hesitate about sticking up a train, and, as I was raised to respect property rights, I got out. I passed on to Denver. There I had the good fortune to enlist in the Navy, and landed in Norfolk, Virginia. Thence by sea to Newport, Rhode Island. Kind teachers with voices like rip-saws and fists like hammers taught me the whereabouts of sails, spars, masts, ropes, halyards, sheets, and all other things appertaining to square-riggers.

WHEN I could box the compass and shoulder a musket without knocking my own head off I was sent out to the general service. The skin was rubbed off in spots, but I pulled through. From the time I entered general service aboard a battleship my life flashed and flickered like a movie film. I was attached to the wireless service, and was also appointed gun-pointer on a main-battery gun. Along about the time I got used to being a sailor the fleet was ordered on its cruise around the world. Before we got back to God's country we had traveled about 35,000 miles and had seen things we didn't suspect existed.

It was while wandering in the jungles of Arkansas that I got the idea to write. The people in that section of the country are as quaint and strange as those I met in China, Japan and India.

CONCERNING "Extrahazardous" a word about the characters might not be out of place. *Price, Burley* and *Hart* are composites of men you will find in the service any day. *"Babe," Kelly* and *Pardee*, however, are regular guys whom I knew personally under different names. As I recall him *Babe* was a dandy little fellow, and always seemed to me to be out of place in the Navy; I could imagine him in no other way than holding the skein of yarn for grandmother while she told him Bible stories. Frequently he came to the office to be mothered and we took him in like a lost lamb. He was the only sailor I ever knew who didn't have at least one bad habit. As for *Kelly*, he was a bird. He was so Irish he spelled "water" w-a-t-h-e-r, and he had about as little use for it as I have for a red elephant. If *Kelly* ever returned from liberty sober I was asleep and didn't see it. When the officer of the deck saw him coming he invariably set down a "D and D" beside his name. Interpreted that means "Drunk and Dirty." Jimmy-Legs would meet him at the gangway and take him below to some quiet spot where he would be allowed to regain sufficient sense to tell his own name. Withal, he was a good fellow and would part with the shirt on his back to help a friend.

AS FOR *Pardee* he was a prince in disguise. To me he typified all that was best in the true man-o'-warsman. He wasn't big as size goes, but you'd think he was a giant to hear him bellow his orders and stride along on those stocky legs of his. And fight! It was the habit of him to fight for the pure pleasure of seeing them fall. "Come one, come all" was his motto, and he took them in any shape, size or degree of fistic ability. If they wanted to spar he would hop around them like a rubber man, stinging them at will; if they wanted to rough it he would fight them from one end of the ship to the other, staining the deck a rich red with

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their own blood the whole way. Normally he was coxswain of a steamer launch, but his friendship for John Barleycorn led to his undoing and he was set in on deck to steady his nerves and force him to lead a virtuous life. If *Pardee* had to die I can imagine him dying in no more fitting way than at the bottom of the sea in a smashed submarine, so I hauled him up out of the China station where I last heard of him and murdered him. I hope you will like *Pardee* and his mates as I did.

A LONG time since we've heard from Algot Lange. The following reached me early in the year, from Para, Brazil:

The old year is closing and I seize a short opportunity to write you and my friends of *Adventure*. I have had no time to dedicate to writing at all for many months as my work as manager of a lumber company has taken all my time and the short time I had while in Para was so occupied with business that writing became a painful act. I know it is shameful to forget old friends, but while I have not written, it is not a token of forgetfulness of heart.

YES, I am succeeding very well. It has been a long and terrible haul to conquer the primary difficulties before I got there. But remember my job was some job—that of creating a large lumber business where no such business had existed at all. We are now shipping 200,000 boardfeet of cedar and mahogany per month.

I have traveled during the last year something like eight thousand miles on the Amazon by-streams and as we have now bought a large steamer for our business the coming year will probably take me more than thrice that distance through the "hinterland." Yes, I have seen a lot of interesting things, been more or less shot at by Indians, seen large boa constrictors (without being shot), and killed a few jaguars. Next month I shall try and send you a skin of the black tiger, if I find some passenger on his way to New York.

TELL our friends, the readers of *Adventure*, that I have received a lot of letters but have not been able to answer any outside of a few dozen which interested me particularly.

Tell them that it is almost impossible to obtain employment here in this region; besides, wages here are lower than anywhere. The few big firms here prefer to employ relatives or proteges. The only big construction firm doing business here is the Madeira Mamore R. R. Co., and they do not seem to hire any further help. This place (I refer to the Amazon Valley) is really only one big hunting ground and only serves as a field for getting fever, stuck by bugs and wishing for ice-water. Let only those come who have time and money. Otherwise the chances are against profit.

WORD from one of the Americans serving with the Canadian forces, written from Canada earlier in the year. It seems to me to bear out some of the things I've already said in defense of Americans serving temporarily under other flags.

The controversy in a small sense which has arisen in re Americans submerging their identities in fighting under other colors than the grand old Stars and Stripes has interested me very much, as it hits me right where I live, and now for a few words regarding my own drab career up to date.

EVERY male ancestor of mine from the days of the Revolution down to the present has fought under that glorious emblem, and I put in about five years under its protection myself in the regulars, having been through the Philippine campaign, most of the time in Samar, under the grandest old C. O's that ever wore the uniform, (now retired by the political activities of a lot of old Bostonese "Antis"), that is, "Hell-roaring Jake" otherwise known as General Jacob L. Smith, Major Carrington, and others of similar repute. I made three trips around the world on various transports. I left the United States Army some years ago.

When this great struggle broke out, and as I watched the new and hitherto unheard-of mechanical devices in death-dealing being put into use and also saw that numerous "Yanks" besides myself were interested to the extent of temporarily taking an oath of allegiance to another ruler, I thought that I could perhaps serve the cause of humanity by doing my little bit in putting down the "Hun" and incidentally learn something of modern warfare, the knowledge so obtained, if I came out with it, to be laid at once at the feet of the War Department for their acceptance if they needed it. Consequently I watched the branch that seemed to be the most in demand, the one that can constantly keep at hand-grips with the enemy and the one that can keep their nerves frazzled the most, and the branch that can open a way for the infantry to go ahead without being slaughtered, and, after much hesitation between the machine-guns and the bombers, I chose the bombers.

I WENT to the District School and I scientifically studied the bombing, until I graduated with as complete a knowledge of the subject as is possible for me to obtain. I know thoroughly the composition of all British, French and German grenades and bombs. Now whether that knowledge obtainable, at first-hand with the necessary blue-prints, by the War Department of our United States of America is not worth the effort that I am making, or whether I am not a renegade American is the question that is being raised. There are forty thousand Americans fighting under the Union Jack alone, and I doubt very much whether they would appreciate being thought anything else but Americans first, and lovers of human liberty for the rest.

I DON'T know how many of us are under the "Tricolor" of old France, but I imagine it nearer sixty thousand. How do these numbers look to one who is perhaps "too proud to fight"?

The Americans that are in the trenches and a few editors like yourself, and the blessed one of *Life*, are the only ones that keep the name of the United States from being heartily cursed from one end of Europe to the other and by the entire population of Canada. After this great struggle is over, our country will need the friendships of some of the world-powers, for the maintenance of trade,

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and it is our "renegades," so-called, who are fighting to help them, and the editors who let their pro-humanitarian feelings be read by the world in general, that are going to keep those friendships. Let these men who are so free to cry down the actions of others think a little before they talk so much and perhaps they won't have so much to say. I personally would endeavor to convince anybody that I was anything but a renegade, who had the nerve to call me such to my face.

The clause that saves the Americans under this flag is that we are to be immediately released for use of our home Government should it at any time become involved in war. So you can see for yourself how quickly we could get released should our country need us.

IN CONNECTION with "Cuckoo's Nest" in this issue there arose a query as to whether murder is a bailable offense in Illinois, so Mr. Barrett consulted a lawyer friend of his, writing me as follows:

While it is not the *regular* practise, it is not unusual in this State for a person to be let out on bail on a murder charge, especially if he has money and influence.

WITH his first story in our magazine, Fred T. Barton, in accordance with

European nationality, including the Cockney Britisher, the staid Scotchman and the fighting Irishman.

"The Taming o' Andy MacArdle" might have occurred at any one of numerous Kansas mining-camps. MacArdle (after being tamed) also might be one of those old Scotch miners who first came West to the new fields from the mines of Virginia and Pennsylvania. Most of them are operators now. The rescue of MacArdle from the mine is real. The incident occurred near Joplin, Missouri, more than a year ago and two miners now treasure Carnegie hero medals for their part in the rescue.

THERE is only one means of assuring our national safety, the safety of the principles and ideals for which our country stands. Universal obligatory military service for Army and Navy. Anything less is only a stop-gap and a danger to ourselves. And, having got universal service, we must see to it that the West Point-Annapolis caste system gradually gives way to the fully democratic system of the splendid army of the French republic.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

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Ask Adventure — A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted by our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each month in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable and standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, but no question answered unless stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Also temporarily covering South American coast from Valparaiso south around the Cape and up to the River Plate. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
FREDERICK WILLIAM WALLACE, *Canadian Fisherman*, 35 St. Alexander St., Montreal, Can. ★ Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; *especially*, seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Such questions as pertain to laws, customs and conditions local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Wallace.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N.Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel; game, fish and woodscraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs, and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Johnson City, Tenn. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

8. Western U. S. Part 2
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, Yankton, S. Dak. Covering North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially*, early history of Missouri valley

9. North American Snow Countries Part 1
C. L. GILMAN, 708 Oneida Bldg., Minneapolis, Minn. Covering Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Manitoba, a strip of Ontario between Minn. and C. P. R'y. Canoes and snow-shoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

10. North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. ★ Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

11. North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. ★ Covering southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

12. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game; minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

13. North American Snow Countries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 805 Jackson St., Santa Clara, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel: boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipments, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

14. Hawaiian Islands
D. L. MACKAYE, Territorial Board of Health, Honolulu, Hawaii. Covering travel, customs, natural history, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

15. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, Sayville, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

16. The Balkans
ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH, *Evening Post*, 20 Vesey St., New York City. Covering Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Turkey (in Europe); travel, sport, customs, language, local conditions, markets, industries.

★(*Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached.*)

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17. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, care R. J. Neuman, 160 Seaman Ave., Inwood, New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

18. Japan and Korea
ROBERT WELLES RITCHIE, Mountain Lakes, N. J. Covering travel, hunting, customs of people, art and curios.

19. Russia and Eastern Siberia
A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Adventurers' Club, 26 N. Dearborn St., Chicago. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalin; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

20. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, 1604 Chapin Ave., Burlingame, Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

21. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Castle View, Meriden, Conn. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, H. I. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

Employment in South America

Question:—"I expect to travel over South America and would like to know the best line of outdoor work to follow. My occupation at present is musician, but am also a seaman and have worked as a leatherworker. Am not out for big money but only want to work my way along and see the country and will 'rough' it as well as the next one."—Identification Card "318."

Answer, by Captain Dingle:—South America, being about twice as large as the United States, is a rather wide field to be covered by general information. However, by your letter, I judge that you will consider Brazil and the Argentine Republic almost big enough for your wanderings. Patagonia, Chile, and Peru, with the lesser states of Uruguay, Paraguay, and the more northerly small republics may attract you later; but for the present I will confine my reply to the greater territories, assuring you that any further information you desire I shall be glad to furnish.

If I were in your place, having your qualifications as to earning-power, this is what I would do: In the big cities, such as Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Bahia, and Para; Cordoba, Santa Fé, and Parana, exists a passion for music of high class which should assure a musician good enough for the Navy as much employment as he wants. I would set out, first, then, to gather in a few dollars in that way. Then, with my instrument packed, I would put together a little kit of leather-working tools, and tramp through the great, wide districts where the settlers live, earning my grub and bunk, with maybe a little coin, by giving the people something they sadly lack, the means of repairing leather articles such as shoes and harness.

You won't have to pack leather. That's one of the country's chief products, in a raw way; but shoes and boots certainly do wear out down there, and sometimes a man and his family live so far from the centers of distribution that a pair of shoes is worth holding on to.

Then, from either Buenos Aires or Montevideo, as a sailor you can get a welcome variety in your tramping by shipping in one of the river steamers up the Parana or Paraguay Rivers. Here you will reach the heart of the continent, and if you like you can plunge into the middle of nature right off the river-bank and still remain in touch with cities and civilization.

Orchid Hunting and Minerals in Borneo

Question:—"Please tell me something about orchid hunting and the chances of success for a man inexperienced in it but used to roughing it. Also about the mineral resources and chances of a white man making money in Borneo."—D. S. CARPENTER, Nogales, Ariz.

Answer, by Mr. McCreagh:—If you are accustomed to roughing it, as you say, you would find little difficulty in adapting yourself to jungle life in Borneo. To go on an orchid raid, you would need a small capital to start with, say a couple of hundred dollars, for providing yourself with tents, outfit, grub, etc., and paying native collectors for about six months.

This, of course, is doing the thing on a shoestring, and is taking a pretty desperate chance. If at the end of that time you have not found anything of real value, and your capital is exhausted, you are up a tree.

The way to take up orchid collecting, as a means of making a decent and pleasant living, is to establish a base at some suitable center in a good orchid district, and from there to make properly organized trips. This, however, needs more money to start with. And whatever way you may elect to try, one qualification is indispensable. You *must know orchids*. Borneo is crawling with orchids, some of them worth nearly two dollars a ton; well, you can't afford to clutter up your camp with that sort of junk. You must be able to distinguish valuable orchids from weeds.

If you don't know these things, my advice would be most emphatically not to go to Borneo with a view to making a living out of orchids right away. It can't be done.

As for mineral resources: Borneo contains a long list of minerals, including gold and diamonds. But let me tell you right here that there is no such thing as the lone white man going out as a prospector and coming back with a sack full of dust. Mining is carried on by big companies under concession. The best that a stranger can do is to get a job with one of the companies. The Borneo Company at Sarawak sometimes offers an opportunity.

The following books will give you a pretty good idea of minerals and of jungle life:—"Borneo, Its Geology and Mineral Resources," by T. Posewitz; and "Wandering in the Great Forests of Borneo," by O. Beccari.

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British Columbia

Question:—A friend and myself have decided to fare Northward in about a year or eighteen months and our ignorance of that region being abysmal, we were "stumped" as to the means of obtaining information concerning outfit, expenses, etc. We are both young and husky, have known hard work and long hours on farm and in factory. Our object is to see some portion of the North, wintering in the woods and taking every opportunity of combining business with pleasure. We will have, or expect to have, some five hundred to six hundred dollars when we hit Seattle in the Spring of 1918. Now, how far will this go toward a Winter outfit? What should said outfit consist of? Can you refer us to any books on practical woodcraft, trapping, or the like? Is there good hunting and fishing in Southern Alaska and the North-Western Canadian Rockies? Is there any Elysium up there under the Northern Lights where a man could combine hunting (for food), trapping and a bit of prospecting for luck?" —Wm. E. Lint, Myersdale, Pa.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—The Kitsumkalum River runs into the Skeena about eighty-five miles from Prince Rupert, B. C. The river proper is about forty miles long, and about twenty miles from where it hits the Skeena it expands into a lake from one to three miles wide, and fifteen miles long. Vanarsdol, a small town at the mouth is reached by taking the steamer to Prince Rupert from Seattle or Vancouver, a trip of some five hundred miles, and thence by train for the balance of the distance. Nothing hard so far, eh? At Vanarsdol canoes may be obtained and the lake reached in this manner. So much for location.

On the lake and from there to headwaters is some of the finest land lying out of doors and it is open to bona fide settlers for pre-emption. Two men of your stamp could locate a claim of 160 acres each and work out your "residence" time in trapping, hunting, fishing and prospecting. There is not the shadow of a doubt but what you could more than support yourselves so far as a grub-stake is concerned while, with regard to your prospecting, there is gold and copper in this region and therefore always a chance of uncovering something worth while. You would certainly "uncover" a most enviable life if I have read your disposition aright from your letter. At the end of three years you can purchase your claims for one dollar per acre by observing certain formalities and this is a prize worth having.

In the event of a hard run of luck employment is to be had within a reasonable distance at good wages, an insurance against actual privation. Many old-timers claim that the Klondike gold streak runs south through this region and prophesy a big strike there some day. The game is abundant while fur is as plentiful there as any place I know of. The climate is just as good as any white man has any right to ask for: three months of fairly severe Winter, two months of uncertainty and seven months of made-to-order days that make one glad to be alive.

Deer are very plentiful and so are black bears. Brown bears are scarcer but still fairly in evidence, while an occasional timber wolf, couger, elk and caribou will be found. The fur consists of beaver, mink, rat, coon, skunk, and a few otter. As to the fishing I need only tell you that, owing to the abundance of trout, salmon are despised.

Five hundred dollars would be ample for a grub-stake and outfit for two which may be obtained at Vanarsdol, thus saving a whole lot of bother in transportation.

As a rule I don't enthuse over locality, but I was impressed by your letter and for this reason am writing to a much greater length than is customary. Should you be interested in this or any other part of the big North and desire further and more detailed information it will be cheerfully given.

Fresh-water Pearls

Question:—"Could you let me know about pearl fishing, and where pearl-bearing mussels are found? Or inform me where I can obtain information about them?"—E. M. DeWitt, Herkimer, N. Y.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—Pearls are found in fresh-water mussel, or clam, shells. They are fished for in Northern New York, as in Saranac and other streams. The pearls, alone, do not often pay for the time put in prospecting and fishing for them. They are found in most streams flowing from limestone country, and in the kinds of shells that grow in the Mohawk River.

The Mississippi Basin streams supply most of the pearls found in fresh waters; the upper Mississippi, Ohio, Cumberland, Wabash, Fox, Illinois, White, St. Francis Rivers yield large numbers of button-shells, and many pearls; wages come from button-shells, pearls are the profits, but profits are less in aggregate value than the wages.

Ranching

Question:—"Will you please give me the addresses of some of the ranch owners in the unsettled parts of the Northwest where they use a good many cowboys? In Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Utah, or some of those states.

This coming June I will complete my last year in the High School. I am 16 years old and pretty good-sized for my age. I want to get a job on a ranch where they rough it. I want to work out in the open for about two years, then come back East."—Merle L. Madera, Grafton, W. Va.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—The old-time ranch with its young army of "punchers" has changed its nature. Where cattle were fenced in by racing broncos with yelling punchers on their backs, they are now held by barbed wire. The great ranchers still sell thousands of cattle, but the huge bands no longer travel long distances on the hoof, guarded and herded by mounted men.

Unfortunately I can not tell you the names of ranch owners in Wyoming, Idaho and Montana, nor their addresses. Miller & Lux run the largest cattle ranch on the coast and their headquarters office is in San Francisco. There are ranches here where many cattle are raised, such as the Hauser Co., Cudahey, and others. In northern Mexico are the big and most like old-time ranches, but no man goes there unless well guarded. It is unsafe and has been for five years.

Write to the Cattlemen's Association of any of these states and put a request on the envelope to forward if address is incorrect. Address your letter to the largest city in the state. You will be very likely to get them, but have return address on envelope.

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LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

***Adventure* has found one man out of five asked for during the past two years.**

CALLEN, PHILO, last heard of on the coast of California. Light hair and blue eyes, about 25 years. Was a cabinet maker. Had deformity of the feet. Was good clarinet player. His home was in Pittsburgh, Pa. —Address C. L. CLINE, Fort Logan, Colo., care Q. M. Corps.

BAIRD, from Glasgowe, Scotland. Sold the Chautauqua Desk in the Pittsburgh district about seven years ago. Height 5 ft., 4 inches; sandy hair; very pleasant; 135 lbs. Any employee of the Chautauqua Desk Co., please write, also the purchasers of the above desk.—Address A. E. KEMMERLING, 7546 Dixon St., Swissdale, Pa.

JENNINGS, ANDREW, "Buzz," left home in Markdale, Ont., twenty-five years ago and went to the school in Michigan to learn hardware business. There three years; then went west. Five years ago in Vancouver, B. C., and had been living in San Francisco; he is about 50 years. We were living in Kincardine, Ont., when we received his last letter about sixteen years ago. Please write your brother. Good news for you.—Address WILLIAM JENNINGS, 56 Craig St., London, Ont., Can.

ROBERTS, CHARLES A., last heard from in Pendleton, Ore., in June 1911. Age 31 years, about 5 ft. 5 in., reddish hair and brown eyes. His father died more than two years ago. His mother inquires.—Address MRS. M. M. ROBERTS, 237 Tremont St., Rochester, N. Y.

HARRIS, JAMES T., left home in Roxbury, Aug. 16, 1904. Reported seen New York year later. Age 17 at time of departure. Light hair and eyes; scar over left eye; about 5 ft. 2 in.; 135 lbs. Any information wanted by mother.—Address MRS. JULIA A. HARRIS, 10 Ball St., Roxbury, Mass.

PETERSON, EARL LESLIE, left home on east side of Portland May 1, 1913. He was then 16 years; athletic build. Light blue eyes, light brown hair, prominent ears. Information wanted by father.—Address J. L. PETERSON, Hotel Howard, Pacific Ave., Tacoma, Wash.

HARRIS, GEORGE, last heard from London, Ont., Oct. 1913. Fair; 5 ft. 7 in.; 135 lbs.; 38 years. Wire worker; all-around mechanic. First joint missing on little finger of one hand. Let me hear from you.—Address ED. HARRIS, 211 Tuscarawas St., East Canton, Ohio.

DISHON, BIRT or (Shorty), last heard of in Terre Haute starting on hunting trip. Expert cook; hunchback. His mother and brother would like to locate him. Any information appreciated.—Address F. H. DISHON, U. S. S. *North Dakota*, care Postmaster, New York.

McGREGOR, STUART. I looked at eclipse of moon with you: suddenly sat in wicker chair. On 19th St. You were last in Coleman, Texas.—Address L. T. 348, care *Adventure.*

YEAGER, NEVA M., and her daughter. Last seen Denver, but heard they were in Cleveland, O., Fall of 1915. Neva has blue eyes and light hair. Age 27 and 6 respectively. Daughter's name Helen. Please notify anxious mother.—Address MRS. OLIVE HORNBUCKLE, Littleton, Colo.

LEBCHER, DR. CHESTER, last heard of in Miles City, Montana. If living he is 66 years. Graduate of University of Michigan.—Address MRS. HARRIETTE E. SAWERS, P. O. Box 67, Grandville, Mich.

HOFFMAN, AUGUST F., "E", 2 F. A.; Wilson, Lewis E., "F" 2 F. A.; Mullen, David W., "B" 8th Cav., Camp Stotensburg Pampanga, P. I. 1913-1914.—Address CLAUD OSBORN, Smuggler, Colo.

HAMILTON, MILDRED FRANCES, sister, last heard from her was five years ago in Vancouver, B. C. I heard she married a man named McCurdy.—Address MRS. L. KELLY, 2329 Grove St., Oakland, Calif.

CUMMINGS, HAROLD R., last heard of in Columbus, O. Please write mother.—Address MRS. FRANCES J. CUMMINGS, 237 East York St., Akron, O.

HARBIN, HAYDEN, last heard of conductor on a Mexican R. R. Was in Chicago in 1903 or '04.—Address A. E. HARBIN, So Bend, Ind., care Wells-Fargo Express Co.

MILLER, "VIRGY." How are "Perrita" and "Babe?" Letter written you brought no answer. Who holds the pulpit now?—Address WS-XV, care *Adventure.*

AVERY, GUS., Silsbee, Kirleyville, Beaumont, Evadale, Texas 1910-11. Galveston, New York, Montreal, Hamburg, Boston, 1911-12. Please write me.—Address A. J., care *Adventure.*

MARTIN, CHAS. F., last heard from in Great Falls, Mont. Feb. 1915. In business in Elidra, Texas 1913-14. Write your old pal.—Address BERNARD SMITH, 7 Hayden St., Roslindale, Boston, Mass.

WHITE, CARL, or any of the other boys out of Truck Co. No. 39 that was stationed at Marfa, Texas.—Address L. G. STEVENSON, 24 Prospect Ave., Cleveland, O.

MOORE, MRS. MAE or, Mae Addison, last seen in Springfield and Peoria Ill. Your adopted sister wants to know your whereabouts.—Address MARJORIE GRAY, Box 75, Roseland, La.

MONTROSS, SAMUEL, uncle. Started for California during gold rush of '49 and was never heard from again. Descendants write.—Address CHAS. G. MONTROSS, 120 W. 46th St., New York City.

McDANIEL, GEORGE, last heard of Kansas City, 1911. Dark hair and complexion. 30 years. Any information appreciated by brother.—Address J. E McDANIEL, care J. C. Goodwin, Plainview, Texas.

McLANAHAN, MRS. CAROLINE, last heard of in 1903, in Chattanooga, Tenn. (Aunt) and MRS. Mattie Priddy (cousin), formerly Miss Mattie Rogers of Chattanooga, Tenn. Write.—Address OSCAR S. ROGERS Q. M. Corps, Fort Mills, Corregidor, P. I.

SURVIVORS of Co. H., 6th Regiment of Infantry, California Volunteers, War of the Rebellion. Names and addresses wanted.—Address JESSE SAUNDERS, Fortine, Lincoln Co., Montana.

CRAMMER, JOHN, was with you in Naco, Ariz. with the C. of the 5th F. A.—Address BEN. G. SEITZ, 710 6th Street, Racine, Wisc.

GEARHART, RAY, last heard from in Sydney, Mont., May, 1915. Would like information.—Address HARRY GEARHART, 236 Grey St., Green Bay, Wisc.

SWAIN, FRED; heard recently he was living in New York City. About 60 years. Please communicate. —Address S. HUBBERT, 1628 Hollins St., Baltimore, Md.

ENGLISH, where are you now? I am working in the mines. I am coming East this Summer.—Address Spike, Goodsprings, Nev.

ANDERSON, "MOONEY" and "Ravenham." The Company clerk would like to hear from you.—Address J. C. B., 1524 Church St., Baker, Ore.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the April or May issues of *Adventure.* They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

ALLISON, BRUCE C.; Andrews, Frank Lee; Beal, George Henry; Beckett, Hugh (Curly); Brackman, Gus; Caldwell, Earl; Campbell, Webb; Clymer, Chas. A.; Collins, Jim and Michael; Cook, Luther; Crossley, John; Curran, Joe; Dickeson, Arthur D.; Estelle, Ed. J.; Flynn, Maurice J.; Griffin, Barry; Hammond, Edward; Hinman, W. W.; Hoffman, A. F.; Honey, J. T.; Jewell, John H. or relations; Lindsay, Alfred; MacVicar, J. F.; Maiden, Wilson F.; Mauk, Stanley M.; Murph, "Kid" Frank; Pollock, G. A.; Pool, Myrtle; Rand, Ferris C.; Robinson, Benjamin; Rowan, A. S.; Russell, John Mac. T.; Schafer, Jacob; Seeley, Edward; Sloane, Howard K.; Smith, rubber worker; Stebbins, Charles; Stettler, Lloyd; Stuart, Frank Wm.; Tobisen, Charles J.; Tompkins, Robert A. "Tex."; Walbert, Morris; Weber, Fred; Whitmer, William and Orlando (father and brother); Williams, Lewis or Bill.

MISCELLANEOUS—Boys of the 213th Batt. Overseas Batt. C. E. F. Also boys of A. Co. or Bugle or Drum Corps of Camp Borden.

EDWIN BLUCK, Mrs. Maude Thomas, Hastlar Gal Breath, Ada B. Rhea, Bertha Wilkins Starkweather.

NUMBERS L. T. 284, C 293, W 311, W 312; L. T. 343. Please send us your present addresses. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us do not reach you.—Address HARRY E. WADE, care *Adventure.*

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How I Raised My Earnings from $30 to $1000 a week

The Story of a Young Man's Remarkable Rise, as Told by Himself

THREE years ago I was earning $30 per week. With a wife and two children to support it was a constant struggle to make both ends meet. We saved very little, and that only by sacrificing things we really needed. To-day my earnings average a thousand dollars weekly. I own two automobiles. My children go to private schools. I have just purchased, for cash, a $25,000 home. I go hunting, fishing, motoring, traveling, whenever I care to, and I do less work than ever before.

What I have done, anyone can do—for I am only an average man. I have never gone to college, my education is limited, and I am not "brilliant" by any means. I personally know at least a hundred men who are better business men than I, who are better educated, who are better informed on hundreds of subjects, and who have much better ideas than I ever had. Yet not one of them approaches my earnings. I mention this merely to show that earning capacity is not governed by the extent of a man's education and to convince my readers that there is only *one* reason for my success—a reason I will give herein.

One day, a few years ago, I began to "take stock" of myself. I found that, like most other men, I had energy, ambition, determination. Yet in spite of these assets, for some reason or other I drifted along without getting anywhere. My lack of education bothered me, and I had thought seriously of making further sacrifices in order to better equip myself to earn more. Then I read somewhere that but few *millionaires* ever went to college. Edison, Rockefeller, Hill, Schwab, Carnegie—not one of them had any more schooling than I had.

One day something happened that woke me up to what was wrong with me. It was necessary for me to make a decision on a matter which was of no great consequence. I knew in my heart what was the right thing to do, but something held me back. I said one thing, then another; I decided one way, then another. I couldn't for the life of me make the decision I knew was right.

I lay awake most of that night thinking about the matter—not because it was of any great importance in itself, but because I was beginning to discover myself. Along towards dawn I resolved to try an experiment. I decided to cultivate my will power, believing that if I did this I would not hesitate about making decisions—that when I had an idea I would have sufficient confidence in myself to put it "over"—that I would not be "afraid" of myself or of things or of others. I felt that if I could smash my ideas across I would soon make my presence felt. I knew that heretofore I had always begged for success—had always stood, hat in hand, depending on others to "give" me the things I desired. In short, I was controlled by the will of others. Henceforth, I determined to have a strong will of my own—*to demand and command what I wanted.*

But how shall I begin? What shall I do first? It was easy enough for me to determine to do things—I had "determined" many times before. But this was a question of will power, and I made up my mind that the first step was to muster up enough of my own will power to stick to and carry out my determination.

With this new purpose in mind I applied myself to finding out something more about will power. I was sure that other men must have studied the subject, and the result of their experience would doubtless be of great value to me in understanding the workings of my own will. So, with a directness of purpose that I had scarcely known before, I began my search.

The results at first were discouraging. While a good deal had been written about the memory and other faculties of the brain, I could find nothing that offered any help to me in acquiring the new power that I had hoped might be possible.

But a little later in my investigation I encountered the works of Prof. Frank Channing Haddock. To my amazement and delight I discovered that this eminent scientist, whose name ranks with James, Bergson and Royce, had just completed the most thorough and constructive study of will power ever made. I was astonished to read his statement, "The will is just as susceptible of development as the muscles of the body"! My question was answered! Eagerly I read further—how Dr. Haddock had devoted twenty years to this study—how he had so completely

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mastered it that he was actually able to set down the very exercises by which anyone could develop the will, making it a bigger, stronger force each day, simply through an easy, progressive course of Training.

It is almost needless to say that I at once began to practice the exercises formulated by Dr. Haddock. And I need not recount the extraordinary results that I obtained almost from the first day. I have already indicated the success that my developed power of will has made for me.

But it may be thought that my case is exceptional. Let me again assure you that I am but an average man, with no super-developed powers, save that of my will. And to further prove my contention, let me cite one or two instances I have since come across, which seem to show conclusively that an indomitable will can be developed by anyone.

One case that comes to my mind is that of a young man who worked in a big factory. He was bright and willing, but seemed to get nowhere. Finally he took up the study of will training, at the suggestion of Mr. W. M. Taylor, the noted efficiency expert, and in less than a year his salary was increased 800%. Then there is the case of C. D. Van Vechten, General Agent of the Northwestern Life Insurance Company, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Just a short time after receiving the methods in will development suggested by Prof. Haddock, he felt that they would be worth from $3,000 to $30,000 to him.

Another man, Mr. H. D. Ferguson, residing in Hot Springs, Ark., increased his earnings from $40 a week to $90 a week in a remarkably short space of time after he began the study of will training. These are but a few—there are many other equally amazing examples which I personally know about. And aside from the financial gain, this training has enabled thousands to overcome drink and other vices almost overnight—has helped overcome sickness and nervousness, has transformed unhappy, envious, discontented people into dominating personalities filled with the joy of living.

Prof. Haddock's lessons, rules and exercises in will training have recently been compiled and published in book form by the Pelton Publishing Co., of Meriden, Conn. Mr. Pelton has authorized me to say that any reader who cares to examine the book may do so without sending any money in advance. In other words, if after a week's reading you do not feel that this book is worth $3, the sum asked, return it and you will owe nothing. When you receive your copy for examination I suggest that you first read the articles on: the law of great thinking; how to develop analytical power; how to perfectly concentrate on any subject; how to guard against errors in thought; how to drive from the mind unwelcome thoughts; how to develop fearlessness; how to use the mind in sickness; how to acquire a dominating personality.

Some few doubters will scoff at the idea of will power being the fountainhead of wealth, position and everything we are striving for, and some may say that no mere book can teach the development of the will. But the great mass of intelligent men and women will at least investigate for themselves by sending for the book at the publisher's risk. I am sure that any book that has done for me — and for thousands of others —what "Power of Will" has done—is well worth investigating. It is interesting to note that among the 150,000 owners who have read, used and praised "Power of Will," are such prominent men as Supreme Court Justice Parker; Wu Tingfang, Ex-U. S. Chinese Ambassador; Lieut.-Gov. McKelvie, of Nebraska; Assistant Postmaster General Britt; General Manager Christeson, of Wells-Fargo Express Co.; E. St. Elmo Lewis, Governor Arthur Capper, of Kansas, and thousands of others.

As a first step in will training, I would suggest immediate action in this matter before you. It is not even necessary to write a letter. Use the form below, if you prefer, addressing it to the Pelton Publishing Company, 48-K Wilcox Block, Meriden, Conn., and the book will come by return mail. This one act may mean the turning point of your life, as it has meant to me and to so many others.

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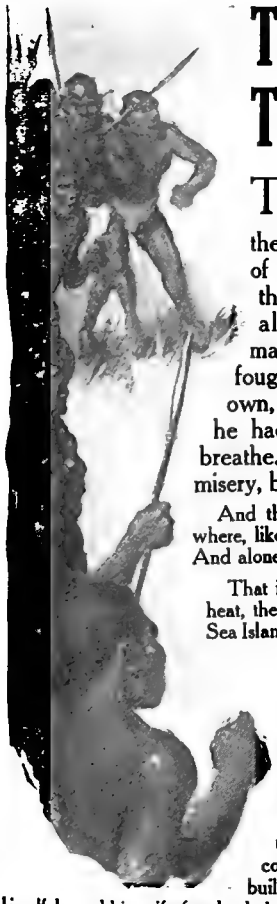
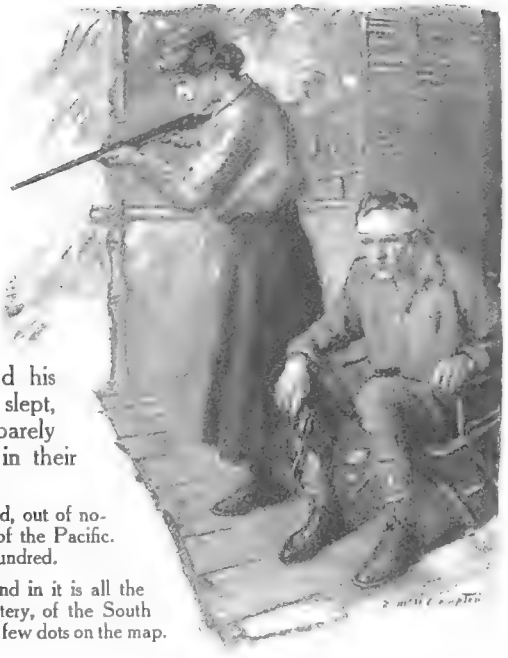


Two Against Two Hundred



THEY were waiting for him to collapse before they killed him. It was one of those little coral islands in the South Seas. He was alone with two hundred man-eating blacks. He had fought with their sickness, and his own, for weeks. He had not slept, he had not eaten—he could barely breathe. He had tended them in their misery, but they had no gratitude.

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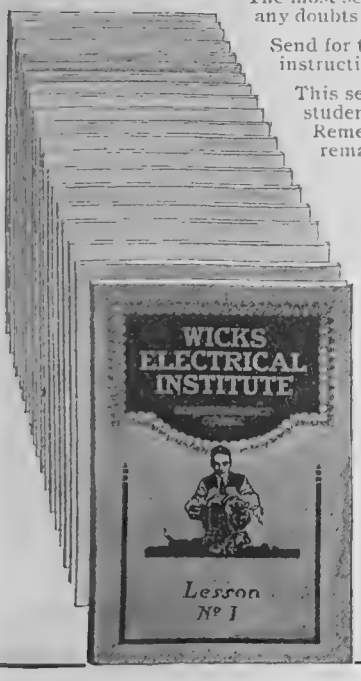

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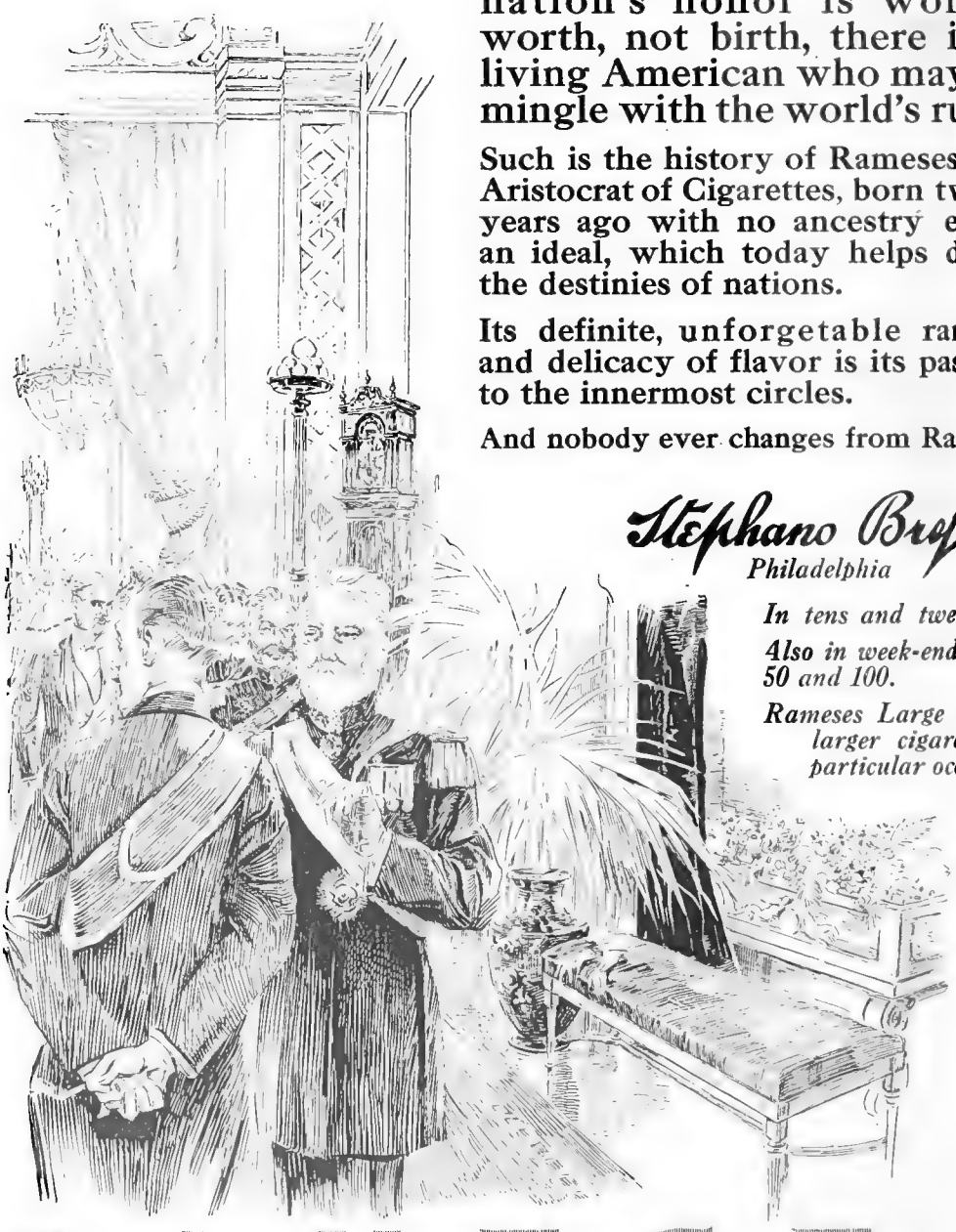

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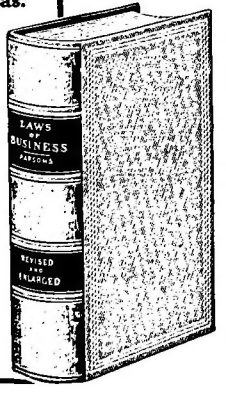

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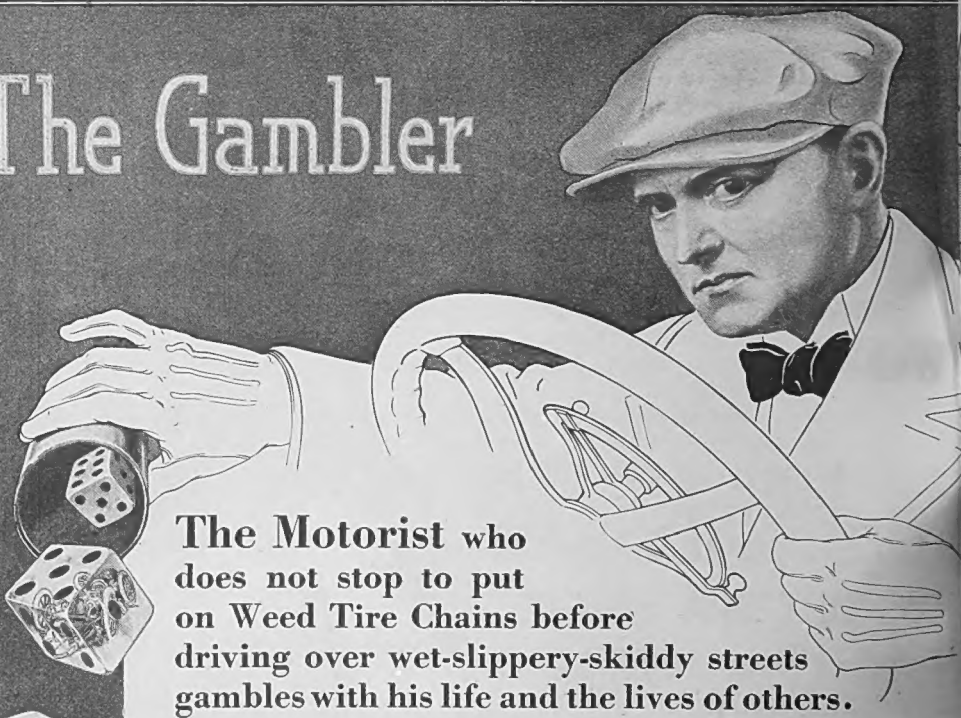

The Motorist who does not stop to put on Weed Tire Chains before driving over wet-slippery-skiddy streets gambles with his life and the lives of others.

Some men would gamble with anything, from a counterfeit coin to life and property and all that they or others hold dear.

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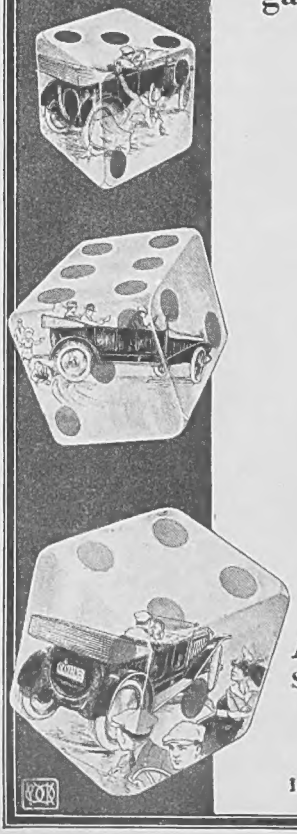

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